

ALL THE YEAR ROUND.

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WITH WHICH IS INCORPORATED HOUSEHOLD WORDS.

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THE MOONSTONE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "THE WOMAN IN WHITE," &c. &c.

CHAPTER IV.

I AM truly sorry to detain you over me and my beehive chair. A sleepy old man, in a sunny back yard, is not an interesting object, I am well aware. But things must be put down in their places, as things actually happened—and you must please to jog on a little while longer with me, in expectation of Mr. Franklin Blake's arrival later in the day.

Before I had time to doze off again, after my daughter Penelope had left me, I was disturbed by a rattling of plates and dishes in the servants' hall, which meant that dinner was ready. Taking my own meals in my own sitting-room, I had nothing to do with the servants' dinner, except to wish them a good stomach to it all round, previous to composing myself once more in my chair. I was just stretching my legs, when out bounced another woman on me. Not my daughter again; only Nancy, the kitchen-maid, this time. I was straight in her way out; and I observed, as she asked me to let her by, that she had a sulky face—a thing which, as head of the servants, I never allow, on principle, to pass me without inquiry.

"What are you turning your back on your dinner for?" I asked. "What's wrong now, Nancy?"

Nancy tried to push by, without answering; upon which I rose up, and took her by the ear. She is a nice plump young lass, and it is customary with me to adopt that manner of showing that I personally approve of a girl.

"What's wrong now?" I said once more.

"Rosanna's late again for dinner," says Nancy. "And I'm sent to fetch her in. All the hard work falls on my shoulders in this house. Let me alone, Mr. Betteredge!"

The person here mentioned as Rosanna was our second housemaid. Having a kind of pity for our second housemaid (why, you shall presently know), and seeing in Nancy's face that she would fetch her fellow-servant in with more hard words than might be needful under the circumstances, it struck me that I had nothing

particular to do, and that I might as well fetch Rosanna myself; giving her a hint to be punctual in future, which I knew she would take kindly from me.

"Where is Rosanna?" I inquired.

"At the sands, of course!" says Nancy, with a toss of her head. "She had another of her fainting-fits this morning, and she asked to go out and get a breath of fresh air. I have no patience with her!"

"Go back to your dinner, my girl," I said. "I have patience with her, and I'll fetch her in."

Nancy (who has a fine appetite) looked pleased. When she looks pleased, she looks nice. When she looks nice, I chuck her under the chin. It isn't immorality—it's only habit.

Well, I took my stick, and set off for the sands.

No! it won't do to set off yet. I am sorry again to detain you; but you really must hear the story of the sands, and the story of Rosanna—for this reason, that the matter of the Diamond touches them both nearly. How hard I try to get on with my statement without stopping by the way, and how badly I succeed! But, there!—Persons and Things do turn up so vexatiously in this life, and will in a manner insist on being noticed. Let us take it easy, and let us take it short; we shall be in the thick of the mystery soon, I promise you!

Rosanna (to put the Person before the Thing, which is but common politeness) was the only new servant in our house. About four months before the time I am writing of, my lady had been in London, and had gone over a Reformatory, intended to save forlorn women from drifting back into bad ways, after they had got released from prison. The matron, seeing my lady took an interest in the place, pointed out a girl to her, named Rosanna Spearman, and told her a most miserable story, which I haven't the heart to repeat here; for I don't like to be made wretched without any use, and no more do you. The upshot of it was, that Rosanna Spearman had been a thief, and not being of the sort that get up Companies in the City, and rob from thousands, instead of only robbing from one, the law laid hold of her, and

the prison and the reformatory followed the lead of the law. The matron's opinion of Rosanna was (in spite of what she had done) that the girl was one in a thousand, and that she only wanted a chance to prove herself worthy of any Christian woman's interest in her. My lady (being a Christian woman, if ever there was one yet) said to the matron, upon that, "Rosanna Spearman shall have her chance, in my service." In a week afterwards, Rosanna Spearman entered this establishment as our second housemaid.

Not a soul was told the girl's story, excepting Miss Rachel and me. My lady, doing me the honour to consult me about most things, consulted me about Rosanna. Having fallen a good deal latterly into the late Sir John's way of always agreeing with my lady, I agreed with her heartily about Rosanna Spearman.

A fairer chance no girl could have had than was given to this poor girl of ours. None of the servants could cast her past life in her teeth, for none of the servants knew what it had been. She had her wages and her privileges, like the rest of them; and every now and then a friendly word from my lady, in private, to encourage her. In return, she showed herself, I am bound to say, well worthy of the kind treatment bestowed upon her. Though far from strong, and troubled occasionally with those fainting-fits already mentioned, she went about her work modestly and uncomplainingly, doing it carefully, and doing it well. But, somehow, she failed to make friends among the other women-servants, excepting my daughter Penelope, who was always kind to Rosanna, though never intimate with her.

I hardly know what the girl did to offend them. There was certainly no beauty about her to make the others envious; she was the plainest woman in the house, with the additional misfortune of having one shoulder bigger than the other. What the servants chiefly resented, I think, was her silent tongue and her solitary ways. She read or worked in leisure hours, when the rest gossiped. And, when it came to her turn to go out, nine times out of ten she quietly put on her bonnet, and had her turn by herself. She never quarrelled, she never took offence; she only kept a certain distance, obstinately and civilly, between the rest of them and herself. Add to this that, plain as she was, there was just a dash of something that wasn't like a housemaid, and that *was* like a lady, about her. It might have been in her voice, or it might have been in her face. All I can say is, that the other women pounced on it like lightning the first day she came into the house; and said (which was most unjust) that Rosanna Spearman gave herself airs.

Having now told the story of Rosanna, I have only to notice one out of the many queer ways of this strange girl, to get on next to the story of the sands.

Our house is high up on the Yorkshire coast,

and close by the sea. We have got beautiful walks all round us, in every direction but one. That one I acknowledge to be a horrid walk. It leads, for a quarter of a mile, through a melancholy plantation of firs, and brings you out between low cliffs on the loneliest and ugliest little bay on all our coast.

The sand-hills here run down to the sea, and end in two spits of rock jutting out opposite each other, till you lose sight of them in the water. One is called the North Spit, and one the South. Between the two, shifting backwards and forwards at certain seasons of the year, lies the most horrible quicksand on the shores of Yorkshire. At the turn of the tide, something goes on in the unknown deeps below, which sets the whole face of the quicksand quivering and trembling in a manner most remarkable to see, and which has given to it, among the people in our parts, the name of The Shivering Sand. A great bank, half a mile out, nigh the mouth of the bay, breaks the force of the main ocean coming in from the offing. Winter and summer, when the tide flows over the quicksand, the sea seems to leave the waves behind it on the bank, and rolls its waters in smoothly with a heave, and covers the sand in silence. A lonesome and a horrid retreat, I can tell you! No boat ever ventures into this bay. No children from our fishing-village, called Cobb's Hole, ever come here to play. The very birds of the air, as it seems to me, give the Shivering Sand a wide berth. That a young woman, with dozens of nice walks to choose from, and company to go with her, if she only said, "Come!" should prefer this place, and should sit and work or read in it, all alone, when it's her turn out, I grant you, passes belief. It's true, nevertheless, account for it as you may, that this was Rosanna Spearman's favourite walk, except when she went once or twice to Cobb's Hole, to see the only friend she had in our neighbourhood—of whom more anon. It's also true that I was now setting out for this same place, to fetch the girl in to dinner, which brings us round happily to our former point, and starts us fair again on our way to the sands.

I saw no sign of the girl in the plantation. When I got out, through the sand-hills, on to the beach, there she was, in her little straw bonnet, and her plain grey cloak that she always wore to hide her deformed shoulder as much as might be—there she was, all alone, looking out on the quicksand and the sea.

She started when I came up with her, and turned her head away from me. Not looking me in the face being another of the proceedings which, as head of the servants, I never allow, on principle, to pass without inquiry—I turned her round my way, and saw that she was crying. My bandanna handkerchief—one of six beauties given to me by my lady—was handy in my pocket. I took it out, and I said to Rosanna, "Come and sit down, my dear, on the slope of the beach along with me. I'll dry your eyes for you first, and then I'll make

so bold as to ask what you have been crying about."

When you come to my age, you will find sitting down on the slope of a beach a much longer job than you think it now. By the time I was settled, Rosanna had dried her own eyes with a very inferior handkerchief to mine—cheap cambric. She looked very quiet, and very wretched; but she sat down by me like a good girl, when I told her. When you want to comfort a woman by the shortest way, take her on your knee. I thought of this golden rule. But there! Rosanna wasn't Nancy, and that's the truth of it!

"Now tell me, my dear," I said, "what are you crying about?"

"About the years that are gone, Mr. Betteredge," says Rosanna, quietly. "My past life still comes back to me sometimes."

"Come, come, my girl," I said, "your past life is all sponged out. Why can't you forget it?"

She took me by one of the lappets of my coat. I am a slovenly old man, and a good deal of my meat and drink gets splashed about on my clothes. Sometimes one of the women, and sometimes another, cleans me of my grease. The day before, Rosanna had taken out a spot for me on the lappet of my coat, with a new composition, warranted to remove anything. The grease was gone, but there was a little dull place left on the nap of the cloth where the grease had been. The girl pointed to that place and shook her head.

"The stain is taken off," she said. "But the place shows, Mr. Betteredge—the place shows!"

A remark which takes a man unawares by means of his own coat is not an easy remark to answer. Something in the girl herself, too, made me particularly sorry for her just then. She had nice brown eyes, plain as she was in other ways—and she looked at me with a sort of respect for my happy old age and my good character, as things for ever out of her own reach, which made my heart heavy for our second housemaid. Not feeling myself able to comfort her, there was only one other thing to do. That thing was—to take her in to dinner.

"Help me up," I said. "You're late for dinner, Rosanna—and I have come to fetch you in."

"You, Mr. Betteredge!" says she.

"They told Nancy to fetch you," I said. "But I thought you might like your scolding better, my dear, if it came from me."

Instead of helping me up, the poor thing stole her hand into mine, and gave it a little squeeze. She tried hard to keep from crying again, and succeeded—for which I respected her. "You're very kind, Mr. Betteredge," she said. "I don't want any dinner to-day—let me bide a little longer here."

"What makes you like to be here?" I asked. "What is it that brings you everlastingly to this miserable place?"

"Something draws me to it," says the girl, making images with her finger in the sand. "I try to keep away from it, and I can't. Sometimes," says she, in a low voice, as if she was frightened at her own fancy, "sometimes, Mr. Betteredge, I think that my grave is waiting for me here."

"There's roast mutton and suet-pudding waiting for you!" says I. "Go in to dinner directly. This is what comes, Rosanna, of thinking on an empty stomach!" I spoke severely, being naturally indignant (at my time of life) to hear a young woman of five-and-twenty talking about her latter end!

She didn't seem to hear me: she put her hand on my shoulder, and kept me where I was, sitting by her side.

"I think the place has laid a spell on me," she said. "I dream of it, night after night; I think of it when I sit stitching at my work. You know I am grateful, Mr. Betteredge—you know I try to deserve your kindness, and my lady's confidence in me. But I wonder sometimes whether the life here is too quiet and too good for such a woman as I am, after all I have gone through, Mr. Betteredge—after all I have gone through. It's more lonely to me to be among the other servants, knowing I am not what they are, than it is to be here. My lady doesn't know, the matron at the reformatory doesn't know, what a dreadful reproach honest people are in themselves to a woman like me. Don't scold me, there's a dear good man. I do my work, don't I? Please not to tell my lady I am discontented—I am not. My mind's unquiet sometimes, that's all." She snatched her hand off my shoulder, and suddenly pointed down to the quicksand. "Look!" she said. "Isn't it wonderful? isn't it terrible? I have seen it dozens of times, and it's always as new to me as if I had never seen it before!"

I looked where she pointed. The tide was on the turn, and the horrid sand began to shiver. The broad brown face of it heaved slowly, and then dimpled and quivered all over. "Do you know what it looks like to me?" says Rosanna, catching me by the shoulder again. "It looks as if it had hundreds of suffocating people under it—all struggling to get to the surface, and all sinking lower and lower in the dreadful deeps! Throw a stone in, Mr. Betteredge! Throw a stone in, and let's see the sand suck it down!"

Here was unwholesome talk! Here was an empty stomach feeding on an unquiet mind! My answer—a pretty sharp one, in the poor girl's own interests, I promise you!—was at my tongue's end, when it was snapped short off on a sudden by a voice among the sand-hills shouting for me by my name. "Betteredge!" cries the voice, "where are you?" "Here!" I shouted out in return, without a notion in my mind of who it was. Rosanna started to her feet, and stood looking towards the voice. I was just thinking of getting on my own legs next, when I was staggered by a sudden change in the girl's face.

Her complexion turned of a beautiful red,

which I had never seen in it before; she brightened all over with a kind of speechless and breathless surprise. "Who is it?" I asked. Rosanna gave me back my own question. "Oh! who is it?" she said softly, more to herself than to me. I twisted round on the sand, and looked behind me. There, coming out on us from among the hills, was a bright-eyed young gentleman, dressed in a beautiful fawn-coloured suit, with gloves and hat to match, with a rose in his button-hole, and a smile on his face that might have set the Shivering Sand itself smiling at him in return. Before I could get on my legs, he plumped down on the sand by the side of me, put his arm round my neck, foreign fashion, and gave me a hug that fairly squeezed the breath out of my body. "Dear old Betteredge!" says he. "I owe you seven and sixpence. Now do you know who I am?"

Lord bless us and save us! Here—four good hours before we expected him—was Mr. Franklin Blake!

Before I could say a word, I saw Mr. Franklin, a little surprised to all appearance, look up from me to Rosanna. Following his lead, I looked at the girl too. She was blushing of a deeper red than ever; seemingly at having caught Mr. Franklin's eye, and she turned and left us suddenly, in a confusion quite unaccountable to my mind, without either making her curtsy to the gentleman or saying a word to me—very unlike her usual self: a civiliser and better-behaved servant, in general, you never met with.

"That's an odd girl," says Mr. Franklin. "I wonder what she sees in me to surprise her?"

"I suppose, sir," I answered, droling on our young gentleman's continental education, "it's the varnish from foreign parts."

I set down here Mr. Franklin's careless question, and my foolish answer, as a consolation and encouragement to all stupid people—it being, as I have remarked, a great satisfaction to our inferior fellow-creatures to find that their betters are, on occasions, no brighter than they are. Neither Mr. Franklin, with his wonderful foreign training, nor I, with my age, experience, and natural mother-wit, had the ghost of an idea of what Rosanna Spearman's unaccountable behaviour really meant. She was out of our thoughts, poor soul, before we had seen the last flutter of her little grey cloak among the sand-hills. And what of that? you will ask, naturally enough. Read on, good friend, as patiently as you can, and perhaps you will be as sorry for Rosanna Spearman as I was, when I found out the truth.

CHAPTER V.

THE first thing I did, after we were left together alone, was to make a third attempt to get up from my seat on the sand. Mr. Franklin stopped me.

"There is one advantage about this horrid place, he said; 'we have got it all to ourselves. Stay where you are, Betteredge; I have something to say to you.'"

While he was speaking, I was looking at him, and trying to see something of the boy I remembered, in the man before me. The man put me out. Look as I might, I could see no more of his boy's rosy cheeks than of his boy's trim little jacket. His complexion had got pale: his face, at the lower part, was covered, to my great surprise and disappointment, with a curly brown beard and moustachios. He had a lively touch-and-go way with him, very pleasant and engaging, I admit; but nothing to compare with his free-and-easy manners of other times. To make matters worse, he had promised to be tall, and had not kept his promise. He was neat, and slim, and well made; but he wasn't by an inch or two up to the middle height. In short, he baffled me altogether. The years that had passed had left nothing of his old self, except the bright, straightforward look in his eyes. There I found our nice boy again, and there I concluded to stop in my investigation.

"Welcome back to the old place, Mr. Franklin," I said. "All the more welcome, sir, that you have come some hours before we expected you."

"I have a reason for coming before you expected me," answered Mr. Franklin. "I suspect, Betteredge, that I have been followed and watched in London, for the last three or four days; and I have travelled by the morning instead of the afternoon train, because I wanted to give a certain dark-looking stranger the slip."

Those words did more than surprise me. They brought back to my mind, in a flash, the three jugglers, and Penelope's notion that they meant some mischief to Mr. Franklin Blake.

"Who's watching you, sir—and why?" I inquired.

"Tell me about the three Indians you have had at the house to-day," says Mr. Franklin, without noticing my question. "It's just possible, Betteredge, that my stranger and your three jugglers may turn out to be pieces of the same puzzle."

"How do you come to know about the jugglers, sir?" I asked, putting one question on the top of another, which was bad manners, I own. But you don't expect much from poor human nature—so don't expect much from me.

"I saw Penelope at the house," says Mr. Franklin; "and Penelope told me. Your daughter promised to be a pretty girl, Betteredge, and she has kept her promise. Penelope has got a small ear and a small foot. Did the late Mrs. Betteredge possess those inestimable advantages?"

"The late Mrs. Betteredge possessed a good many defects, sir," says I. "One of them (if you will pardon my mentioning it) was never keeping to the matter in hand. She was more like a fly than a woman: she couldn't settle on anything."

"She would just have suited me," says Mr. Franklin. "I never settle on anything either. Betteredge, your edge is better than ever. Your

daughter said as much, when I asked for particulars about the jugglers. 'Father will tell you, sir. He's a wonderful man for his age; and he expresses himself beautifully.' Penelope's own words—blushing divinely. Not even my respect for you prevented me from—never mind; I knew her when she was a child, and she's none the worse for it. Let's be serious. What did the jugglers do?"

I was something dissatisfied with my daughter—not for letting Mr. Franklin kiss her; Mr. Franklin was welcome to *that*—but for forcing me to tell her foolish story at second hand. However, there was no help for it now but to mention the circumstances. Mr. Franklin's merriment all died away as I went on. He sat knitting his eyebrows, and twisting his beard. When I had done, he repeated after me two of the questions which the chief juggler had put to the boy—seemingly for the purpose of fixing them well in his mind.

"Is it on the road to this house, and on no other, that the English gentleman will travel to-day?" "Has the English gentleman got it about him?" I suspect," says Mr. Franklin, pulling a little sealed paper parcel out of his pocket, "that 'It' means *this*. And 'this,' Betteredge, means my uncle Herncastle's famous Diamond."

"Good Lord, sir!" I broke out, "how do you come to be in charge of the wicked Colonel's Diamond?"

"The wicked Colonel's will has left his Diamond as a birthday present to my cousin Rachel," says Mr. Franklin. "And my father, as the wicked Colonel's executor, has given it in charge to me to bring down here."

If the sea, then oozing in smoothly over the Shivering Sand, had been changed into dry land before my own eyes, I doubt if I could have been more surprised than I was when Mr. Franklin spoke those words.

"The Colonel's Diamond left to Miss Rachel!" says I. "And your father, sir, the Colonel's executor! Why, I would have laid any bet you like, Mr. Franklin, that your father wouldn't have touched the Colonel with a pair of tongs!"

"Strong language, Betteredge! What was there against the Colonel? He belonged to your time, not to mine. Tell me what you know about him, and I'll tell you how my father came to be his executor, and more besides. I have made some discoveries in London about my uncle Herncastle and his Diamond, which have rather an ugly look to my eyes; and I want you to confirm them. You called him the 'wicked Colonel' just now. Search your memory, my old friend, and tell me why."

I saw he was in earnest, and I told him.

Here follows the substance of what I said, written out entirely for your benefit. Pay attention to it, or you will be all abroad, when we get deeper into the story. Clear your mind of the children, or the dinner, or the new bonnet, or what not. Try if you can't forget politics, horses, prices in the City, and grievances at the club. I hope you won't take this freedom on

my part amiss; it's only a way I have of appealing to the gentle reader. Lord! haven't I seen you with the greatest authors in your hands, and don't I know how ready your attention is to wander when it's a book that asks for it, instead of a person?

I spoke, a little way back, of my lady's father, the old lord with the short temper and the long tongue. He had five children in all. Two sons to begin with; then, after a long time, his wife broke out breeding again, and the three young ladies came briskly one after the other, as fast as the nature of things would permit; my mistress, as before mentioned, being the youngest and best of the three. Of the two sons, the eldest, Arthur, inherited the title and estates. The second, the Honourable John, got a fine fortune left him by a relative, and went into the army.

It's an ill bird, they say, that fouls its own nest. I look on the noble family of the Herncastles as being my nest; and I shall take it as a favour if I am not expected to enter into particulars on the subject of the Honourable John. He was, I honestly believe, one of the greatest blackguards that ever lived. I can hardly say more or less for him than that. He went into the army, beginning in the Guards. He had to leave the Guards before he was two-and-twenty—never mind why. They are very strict in the army, and they were too strict for the Honourable John. He went out to India to see whether they were equally strict there, and to try a little active service. In the matter of bravery (to give him his due), he was a mixture of bull-dog and game-cock, with a dash of the savage. He was at the taking of Seringapatam. Soon afterwards he changed into another regiment, and, in course of time, changed again into a third. In the third he got his last step as lieutenant-colonel, and, getting that, got also a sunstroke, and came home to England.

He came back with a character that closed the doors of all his family against him, my lady (then just married) taking the lead, and declaring (with Sir John's approval, of course) that her brother should never enter any house of hers. There was more than one slur on the Colonel that made people shy of him; but the blot of the Diamond is all I need mention here.

It was said he had got possession of his Indian jewel by means which, bold as he was, he didn't dare acknowledge. He never attempted to sell it—not being in need of money, and not (to give him his due again) making money an object. He never gave it away; he never even showed it to any living soul. Some said he was afraid of its getting him into a difficulty with the military authorities; others (very ignorant indeed of the real nature of the man) said he was afraid, if he showed it, of its costing him his life.

There was, perhaps, a grain of truth mixed up with this last report. It was false to say that he was afraid; but it was a fact that his life had been twice threatened in India; and it

was firmly believed that the Moonstone was at the bottom of it. When he came back to England, and found himself avoided by everybody, the Moonstone was thought to be at the bottom of it again. The mystery of the Colonel's life got in the Colonel's way, and out-laid him, as you may say, among his own people. The men wouldn't let him into their clubs; the women—more than one—whom he wanted to marry, refused him; friends and relations got too near-sighted to see him in the street.

Some men in this mess would have tried to set themselves right with the world. But to give in, even when he was wrong, and had all society against him, was not the way of the Honourable John. He had kept the Diamond, in flat defiance of assassination, in India. He kept the Diamond, in flat defiance of public opinion, in England. There you have the portrait of the man before you, as in a picture: a character that braved everything; and a face, handsome as it was, that looked possessed by the devil.

We heard different rumours about him from time to time. Sometimes they said he was given up to smoking opium, and collecting old books; sometimes he was reported to be trying strange things in chemistry; sometimes he was seen carousing and amusing himself among the lowest people in the lowest slums of London. Anyhow, a solitary, vicious, underground life was the life the Colonel led. Once, and once only, after his return to England, I myself saw him, face to face.

About two years before the time of which I am now writing, and about a year and a half before the time of his death, the Colonel came unexpectedly to my lady's house in London. It was the night of Miss Rachel's birthday, the twenty-first of June; and there was a party in honour of it, as usual. I received a message from the footman to say that a gentleman wanted to see me. Going up into the hall, there I found the Colonel, wasted, and worn, and old, and shabby, and as wild and as wicked as ever.

"Go up to my sister," says he; "and say that I have called to wish my niece many happy returns of the day."

He had made attempts by letter, more than once already, to be reconciled with my lady, for no other purpose, I am firmly persuaded, than to annoy her. But this was the first time he had actually come to the house. I had it on the tip of my tongue to say that my mistress had a party that night. But the devilish look of him daunted me. I went up-stairs with his message, and left him, by his own desire, waiting in the hall. The servants stood staring at him, at a distance, as if he was a walking engine of destruction, loaded with powder and shot, and likely to go off among them at a moment's notice.

My lady has a dash—no more—of the family temper. "Tell Colonel Hernecastle," she said, when I gave her her brother's message, "that

Miss Verinder is engaged, and that I decline to see him." I tried to plead for a civil answer than that; knowing the Colonel's constitutional superiority to the restraints which govern gentlemen in general. Quite useless! The family temper flashed out at me directly. "When I want your advice," says my lady, "you know that I always ask for it. I don't ask for it now." I went down-stairs with the message, of which I took the liberty of presenting a new and amended edition of my own contriving, as follows: "My lady and Miss Rachel regret that they are engaged, Colonel; and beg to be excused having the honour of seeing you."

I expected him to break out, even at that polite way of putting it. To my surprise he did nothing of the sort; he alarmed me by taking the thing with an unnatural quiet. His eyes, of a glittering bright grey, just settled on me for a moment; and he laughed, not *out* of himself, like other people, but *into* himself, in a soft, chuckling, horribly mischievous way. "Thank you, Betteredge," he said. "I shall remember my niece's birthday." With that, he turned on his heel, and walked out of the house.

The next birthday came round, and we heard he was ill in bed. Six months afterwards—that is to say, six months before the time I am now writing of—there came a letter from a highly respectable clergyman to my lady. It communicated two wonderful things in the way of family news. First, that the Colonel had forgiven his sister on his death-bed. Second, that he had forgiven everybody else, and had made a most edifying end. I have myself (in spite of the bishops and the clergy) an unfeigned respect for the Church; but I am firmly persuaded, at the same time, that the devil remained in undisturbed possession of the Honourable John, and that the last abominable act in the life of that abominable man was (saving your presence) to take the clergyman in!

This was the sum-total of what I had to tell Mr. Franklin. I remarked that he listened more and more eagerly the longer I went on. Also, that the story of the Colonel being sent away from his sister's door, on the occasion of his niece's birthday, seemed to strike Mr. Franklin like a shot that had hit the mark. Though he didn't acknowledge it, I saw that I had made him uneasy, plainly enough, in his face.

"You have said your say, Betteredge," he remarked. "It's my turn now. Before, however, I tell you what discoveries I have made in London, and how I come to be mixed up in this matter of the Diamond, I want to know one thing. You look, my old friend, as if you didn't quite understand the object to be answered by this consultation of ours. Do your looks belie you?"

"No, sir," I said. "My looks, on this occasion at any rate, tell the truth."

"In that case," says Mr. Franklin, "suppose I put you up to my point of view, before we go any further. I see three very serious

questions involved in the Colonel's birthday-gift to my cousin Rachel. Follow me carefully, Betteredge; and count me off on your fingers, if it will help you," says Mr. Franklin, with a certain pleasure in showing how clear-headed he could be, which reminded me wonderfully of old times when he was a boy. "Question the first: Was the Colonel's Diamond the object of a conspiracy in India? Question the second: Has the conspiracy followed the Colonel's Diamond to England? Question the third: Did the Colonel know the conspiracy followed the Diamond; and has he purposely left a legacy of trouble and danger to his sister, through the innocent medium of his sister's child? *That is what I am driving at, Betteredge. Don't let me frighten you.*"

It was all very well to say that, but he *had* frightened me.

If he was right, here was our quiet English house suddenly invaded by a devilish Indian diamond—bringing after it a conspiracy of living rogues, set loose on us by the vengeance of a dead man. There was our situation, as revealed to me in Mr. Franklin's last words! Who ever heard the like of it—in the nineteenth century, mind, in an age of progress, and in a country which rejoices in the blessings of the British constitution? Nobody ever heard the like of it, and, consequently, nobody can be expected to believe it. I shall go on with my story, however, in spite of that.

When you get a sudden alarm, of the sort that I had got now, nine times out of ten the place you feel it in is your stomach. When you feel it in your stomach, your attention wanders, and you begin to fidget. I fidgeted silently in my place on the sand. Mr. Franklin noticed me, contending with a perturbed stomach, or mind—which you please; they mean the same thing—and, checking himself just as he was starting with his part of the story, said to me sharply, "What do you want?"

What did I want? I didn't tell *him*; but I'll tell *you*, in confidence. I wanted a whiff of my pipe, and a turn at Robinson Crusoe.

BOY MONSTERS.

WAS it not Yorick who first told us of the famous Vincent Quirino, who, in the eighth year of his age, posted up in the public schools at Rome no less than four thousand five hundred and sixty different theses upon the most abstruse points of the most abstruse theology, which he defended and maintained in such sort as to cramp and dumbfound his opponents? When Mr. Shandy talked of the prodigies of childhood who were masters of fourteen languages at ten, and so forth, and when Yorick said, "You forget the great Lipsius, who composed a work the day he was born"—who but Uncle Toby could have been so judiciously rude as to remark on that last work, "They should have wiped it up, and said no more about it"? But before Mr. Shandy and Yorick were thus erudite upon

erudition in pinafores, they had been reading, as I, sad Ignoramus, have been reading since, a terrible book by the Sieur Adrien Baillet, librarian to Monsieur the Advocate-General Lamignon. It is a French account of Children become Famous by their Studies or their Writings, published in the year of our English Revolution; and a pretty revolution of its own this work, whether composed in the first or last year of its author's life, will make in the head of any one who, like myself, is rather sensitive than sensible. Talk of ghosts! why, the stories in this book have nearly frightened a school-master to death in broad daylight! I lent it him, and might almost as well have put ratsbane into his supper. He read it overnight, and shook in his shoes when he sat at his desk next morning. A pedagogue frowned at him in every little boy upon his form. Where there had been in school one master to fifty boys, here there were fifty masters to one mannikin. My friend Jerkins, the father of a little family, has been rash enough to read this book, though I advised him not to do so, after seeing the calamities it brought on other of my friends. Jerkins, who snapped his fingers at advice, now buries his head in his newspaper at breakfast-time, and dares not comment as usual upon Italian and Irish news, lest the very baby should cry down to him out of the nursery that he is a blockhead who does not know Verona from Pomona, and is all abroad as to the geography of Ballybog.

Justus Lipsius, for example. What person above forty could have looked at such a child without winking and blinking? His friends, Philology and Philosophy, visible in the shape of two white children, visited his mother a few hours before he was born. His benighted parents sent him to three schools, and in each one he was taught out of a different grammar. But from all the three grammars he got nothing that he did not know before. I have learnt to look with awe upon Great Babies. Alexander the Great was, it is said, Great as a Baby. He was taught by Aristotle to sit thinking in his nurse's arms, and used to lie awake of nights, troubled with the philosophy. He received Persian Ambassadors in place of his Papa as soon as he could speak. There are people who doubt this, and there are people who doubt everything, even ghosts—prodigies themselves of doubt upon all things that are prodigious. Will they allow that Tiberius, at the age of nine, delivered a funeral Oration over his deceased Father, and that Augustus, at the age of twelve, delivered a like Oration over his deceased Grandmother; and that Cicero, at the age of thirteen, wrote a treatise on the Art of Talking? Children's tongues will wag, and only a child can know, or be expected to tell us, how it is that they can keep them wagging as they do. For which reason I feel much beholden to Master Cicero, though, being an Ignoramus, I do wish he had not had, even in early years, that hankering for Latin which prevented him from writing in plain English, as a Christian ought. There

is another prodigy, called particularly the Young One—Pliny the Young One—who not only wrote a Greek Play, but also took a wife when he was but a bit of a boy. Marcus Aurelius, when he was heir-apparent of the Roman Empire, knew, at the age of twelve, all that was in the heads of all the philosophers, and set up for a wise child himself by putting on the philosopher's gown, which he took off at night with his other clothes, when, to air his philosophy, he went to bed on the ground out of doors, with no sort of gown on him or nightcap either. As this young gentleman was heir-apparent, the Police, I suppose, had orders not to tuck him up.

In the year fourteen hundred and forty-five there was a young gentleman without a name exhibited at Paris, who was master of all the arts and sciences, though only just out of his teens. He was a match for all the learned in all forms of lore. It seems to have occurred to his parents that he was as good a monster as a ram with six legs, for which reason they put him in a caravan. At any rate, he was exhibited in Paris, and drew well. Indeed, he became quite fashionable, because it was maintained that he was Antichrist, whom it was worth while to see at any rate, and to pay one's half-crown for the chance of putting down.

Pico della Mirandola made a digest of the canon law at ten years old; and my belief is that, if ever there is to be a digest of the statutes of Great Britain, we had better advertise for able-minded boys of ten, and get the work done in little by sages who themselves are little. Somebody says that Master Pico, by the time he was eighteen, spoke two-and-twenty languages. Michel Verin produced, at the age of fourteen or fifteen, a book of Proverbs in verse. It has gone through various editions, and has had old men for commentators. Christophe de Longueil, from his infancy, read without skipping. He finished honestly every book that he began; however dull, however useless it might prove to be. The prize the boy got for his diligence was that at the age of eighteen he became Privy Councillor and Minister of State to the King of Spain.

In the Netherlands there was a Mynheer Canteres, who had four children, three boys and a girl, each of whom knew everything at the age of ten. As there were not people enough in their own country to pay them all the admiration they deserved, they were taken, as a performing band of brothers, through Germany, France, and Italy, astonishing the learned everywhere. Why not produce a troupe of such erudite babes at the Egyptian Hall, fetching out the wisdom of the stalls, and getting our friends Doodle and Fozzle to employ themselves upon the testing of their erudition?

Of the Admirable Crichton I say nothing, except that M. Baillet calls him Critton. But what of that? Did not the great French republic record its admiration of the genius of Schiller by enrolling him among its citizens as Monsieur Gilles? Louis Stella was at the University of Orleans professor of Greek at the

age of fifteen, and drew a large concourse of students to hear his elucidations of Greek authors, especially of Lucian and Aristophanes. The university and city of Paris received, in the sixteenth century, an electric shock from a tragedy and two comedies in French, produced by little Jacques Grevin at the age of thirteen or fourteen. He followed them up with such pastorals, such hymns, such sonnets, that Ronsard lost appetite through jealousy. Nicodemus Fischlin was both a Greek and a Latin poet when thirteen years old. Homer was only a Greek poet. Virgil was only a Latin poet. Fischlin was both. Jerome de la Rovère, at the age of ten, collected and published his "Poetical Works." From which we are told we must infer that he had begun as poet when seven or eight years old, and must have been by that time master of Latin, have studied the art of poetry, and formed his taste by a careful reading of the best authors. But what of that? Thomas Zamoyksi was not thirteen years old when he thoroughly understood and spoke fluently and correctly the Greek, Latin, Turkish, German, Sclavie, and Tartar languages, and was far gone in Arabic. The Spanish dramatist, Lope de Vega, was most anxious to give poems to the world before he could speak. He was griped visibly by the Muses, and before he was strong enough to hold a pen, and learn to write, we are told that he dictated to others verses of his own composition. Monsieur de Peiresc, as soon as he began to speak, was so urgent upon every one for answers to profound inquiries into the cause of everything, that his father found it useless to have any servant in the house—cook, valet, or footman—who was not versed in Latin and Greek, who could not draw, engrave, bind books, describe and illustrate by drawings or plans everything that was likely to be asked after in geology, zoology, and botany. Little Peiresc, at the age of seven, asked for and obtained of his father the sole charge of the education of a little brother two years younger than himself, taking the direction, not only of his studies, but also of the general formation of his mind and morals.

Hugo Grotius was a Latin poet at the age of eight. His friend, Denis Petou, in his infancy did nothing but read books, and was a master of versification at the age of nine. Milton's antagonist, Salmasius, when ten years old, translated the whole of Pindar into verse. Thomas Hobbes at the age of eleven turned a play of Euripides into Latin verse; and Gaspar Barthius at the age of twelve translated the Psalms of David into Latin verse of every form. Bonthillier de Rance at the age of thirteen published a new edition of the poems of Anacreon, with notes of his own in Greek; and before he was quite fourteen, Gabriel de Burta published a Latin folio of Universal History, Sacred and Profane.

Fortunio Liceti was no bigger than the palm of a hand when prematurely born at sea. But his father, being a physician, put him in a

hatching-machine when they came to shore, and produced so fine a result, that his boy, before he was out of his teens, produced a book of no less name than "Gonopsychanthropologia." The young Bignon, again, was described by the preceptor of King Louis the Thirteenth as "an old man of twelve, a consummate doctor in his infancy."

Pascal at eleven years old noticed the sound made by striking a knife on a plate, and that it was not the same sound when the plate had anything under it. This set him thinking, and led to the production of a philosophical treatise. When Samuel Bochart was a child, he read in Hebrew not only the book of the Prophets, but knew also in their own tongue all the commentaries of the Rabbins, and proceeded to learn Syriac, Chaldean, and Arabic. My senses reel. One horror more, and I am dumb. Three years before M. Baillet collected these veracious monster tales to stir the mind of a small boy in his own charge, a volume had appeared entitled "Miscellaneous Works of an Author seven years old. Collection of the works of Monsieur the Duke du Maine, written during the year sixteen hundred and seventy-seven and in the beginning of the year sixteen seventy-eight." His great experience of life caused the works of this little author to consist mainly of "Maxims."

SIR JOHN'S TROUBLES.

IN FOUR CHAPTERS. CHAPTER IV.

WHEN Sir John Milson left home to go to Kensington that morning, he did not wish or intend to deceive his wife, or to tell her an untruth. He was bound in honour, as he conceived, to respect the secret which his old friend had entrusted him with, and he was anxious to do a kind turn to two young women who were somewhat dull, very lonely, quite young, and naturally very anxious to see something of London. Had he been a man careless of appearances, he would have walked out in open noon-day with either, or both of these girls, utterly defiant of what people might say or think. If he had been one who rather glories in a certain kind of reputation, he would only have been too delighted to give others cause for surmises and jokes, which, whilst ruining the characters of the Miss Fabers, would have been utterly untrue. But Milson was none of these. He was a true-hearted, loyal gentleman, anxious to do his best towards those entrusted to his care, and yet determined not to tell that which Colonel Laker had insisted should be kept a profound secret. Hitherto he had been exceedingly cautious, notwithstanding the hints and innuendoes of tradesmen and others whom he had employed, or of those who had seen the letters addressed to him at the club in a lady's hand. But on a Monday in the early part of May, before the flower-shows and the concerts begin to attract visitors, the Crystal Palace is not a very likely place at which any one moving in "society" is likely to meet his friends. Ac-

cordingly, when it was at last resolved that the young lady who was indisposed should remain at home, and the governess remain to nurse her, Sir John agreed to take the sister down to Sydenham, and felt like a man about to do a good action when he started to walk with her to the Kensington station.

There was not a better nor a kinder hearted woman in London than Lady Fantzle, so much so that her friends and relations were continually imposing upon her in various ways. Amongst other things she was noted for was the fact of her keeping a sort of house of call, at any rate about luncheon-hour, for all the young lads from Eton, Rugby, and Harrow, who happened to be up in London. Many and sundry were the youths who on one pretext or another found their way to Harley-street during the different vacations, and who invariably left "Aunt Fantzle's" a sovereign the richer, and a good luncheon the better, after the short sojourn. The day Lady Milson went to lunch with her old friend, she found no less than three very restless noisy youngsters there beforehand, and Lady Fantzle, for once in her life, not a little put out by the inopportune coincidence of such different persons coming to her house on the same day. "I really cannot help it," she explained to Annie; "my sister, Mrs. Wallson, is so very thoughtless. Her own two sons are at home for Easter, and her nephew is also spending his holidays with them. This morning, without giving me the slightest warning, she sent the three lads over to spend the day with me, as she had gone to show Windsor to some French friends who are in London. It is really too bad. I must keep my eye on the boys all the day, and send them back in charge of the footman at night. They will sit quiet enough when we are in the carriage, but what *can* we do with them at the Royal Academy? They will get fidgety before we have been there half an hour, and I wanted to make a good long day of it."

"Never mind," replied Lady Milson, "I will come to lunch with you on Friday, and we can go then to the exhibition; let us take your nephews to the Zoological Gardens to-day."

"Not for the world, Annie," replied Lady Fantzle; "do you want me to leave one, if not two, of the boys behind in the bears' pit or the tigers' cage? If there is mischief to be had anywhere, or if there is anything to be done which ought to be left undone, the eldest boy, George, is certain to find it out and to do it. I quite dread the responsibility of taking charge of him and his brother even for these few hours. If I had not to go out this evening, I would drive about London until dinner-time, and thus keep them from any possible mischief, but, as it is, my horses could not stand the work."

"I'll tell you what we'll do," suggested Lady Milson, "we'll go to the Crystal Palace. We can drive to the Victoria station; it will be past three before we get to Sydenham; if we remain a couple of hours there we shall be able to keep the boys out of mischief in the grounds, and

by the time we get back to London it will be late enough to send the lads back to your sister's."

It was thus agreed that their afternoon should be spent in keeping these wild youths quiet by taking them to the Crystal Palace, and thither they repaired, stopping on their way at the India House in Victoria-street, where Lady Milson left a message for Sir John, to say that she was not going to the National Gallery, but that he would find her at the Crystal Palace until half-past five.

Schoolboys seem to have an extraordinary facility of getting hungry at all times. Two hours, after eating they are invariably ready again for food. Lady Fantzle knew this, and, partly from her habitual wish to please every one, partly owing to her desire that the boys should not get into mischief whilst under her charge, she proposed, shortly after they arrived at Sydenham, indulging her nephews in a modest repast of ices and biscuits, although little more than two hours had passed since they had risen from her abundantly provided luncheon-table in Harley-street. To this Lady Milson agreed, and the whole party turned into the refreshment-rooms, and sat down at one of the marble-topped tables which always look so cool and inviting in the hottest weather. There were not many persons present at the time, but amongst them was a couple who seemed to be laughing very heartily at something. The lady, who had her face turned towards Lady Fantzle's party, was young, handsome, a very decided brunette, with very fine black eyes, and, although well, somewhat over-dressed. The gentleman had his back to the new comers; presently he turned round, and Sir John and Lady Milson looked at each other.

No matter how innocent or upright in his acts and intentions a man may be, to find himself in the position which Sir John did, could hardly prove other than awkward in the extreme. He had left home in the morning, telling his wife that he was going into the City on business, and expressing great doubts whether he would have time to meet her even at the end of the afternoon in Trafalgar-square; and here she finds him, not only taking his ease at the Crystal Palace, but accompanied by a young, good-looking, and somewhat over-dressed girl. The very fact of finding him how and where she did, added to her already excited suspicions about the cheque-book, was enough to make her think that Sir John had private amusements and companionships which, to a wife, must be the reverse of pleasing. However, Annie was not a woman to let others see that she suspected hidden rocks. To use a somewhat hackneyed expression, she always washed her dirty linen at home. She was, moreover, a woman of great presence of mind, and so a moment's reflection made her equal to the present emergency. "I see," said she to Lady Fantzle, in the coolest way possible, "that Sir John has been victimised into bringing one of those Miss Smiths out to see this

place. I'll go and speak to him; for if he brings her over here she'll bother you fearfully." And to the place in which her husband was sitting she went, trusting with good reason to Lady Fantzle's short-sightedness, that the way in which she treated her husband's companion might not be seen by the old lady.

"I have saved your reputation with Lady Fantzle," she whispered to Sir John, in a tone and with a manner which he had never seen her assume before in his life; "don't disgrace me. I have said that your companion is a Miss Smith, the daughter of a friend of ours; keep up the untruth for the present, at least."

During this short speech she never once looked at poor Miss Faber, who sat wondering who the lady with the stern manner could be; why Sir John, who had until now been so gay and pleasant, seemed so much put out; and what the mysterious whisperings could be about. The young lady little thought that she was the innocent cause of very serious misunderstandings between a couple that had lived happily together for thirty years. Sir John went over to speak to Lady Fantzle, said something about being hampered with a young lady who had never been in London before, and then returned to his charge, but in no mood for enjoying any more his day at the Crystal Palace. Miss Faber saw at once that something had gone wrong, and herself proposed that they should return to town at an early hour. Poor girl, her enjoyment for that day was entirely gone.

Sir John, after seeing his charge to the door of her house at Kensington, and making some excuse for not going in, went to his club, and ordering dinner, sat down to think over how he had better get out of the mess which his friend's folly had got him into. Should he at once go home and tell Annie the whole story? That would be the plainest, simplest, and most certain mode of procedure; but would it not be betrayal of the confidence placed in him by Colonel Laker? The latter had made it a particular condition that Lady Milson should know nothing of his story, and would it be right to betray him? And yet how else could he satisfy his wife that there was nothing wrong in his conduct? He knew Annie was a woman of sense, and yet appearances were so very much against him, that he could only clear up his conduct by telling her the whole truth, and this was exactly what he could not do. And yet "something" had to be done—but what? As he sat at dinner, old Colonel Duckson (a bachelor of sixty-five, with the pursuits of a very wild young man of twenty-four, and who believed himself to be barely in the prime of life) came and sat down by Sir John, joking him in a winking sort of way about the "good-looking young party" he had seen him with near the Kensington station that morning. Duckson lived in Kensington, and from what he said it would seem that he knew full well that Milson often visited that part of London, of course giving him credit for a very different intention from the real one which

led him there. But although worried and annoyed at the stupid jokes of the old boy, Sir John felt still more angry when he reflected that what Colonel Duckson knew was invariably and very quickly imparted to all the Oriental Club, as well as to the leading members of the great Anglo-Indian colony which inhabits the southern parts of Tyburnia and the northern parts of Kensington. He felt certain that before a month was over the very name of the terrace, and the number of the house which the unsuspecting Miss Fabers inhabited, would be known, talked of, and canvassed in every house in London of which the rent was paid by a retired Indian military man or a pensioned member of the Indian Civil Service. He was therefore all the more convinced that it was high time "something" should be done, and yet when he left the club he was as undecided as ever what to do. He put off the hour of going home as long as he possibly could. He read and re-read the Pall Mall Gazette of that evening until he knew it all by heart. He then took up the Globe, saw what that organ had to say against Mr. Bright and in favour of Mr. Disraeli; and by way of being impartial he then read what the Evening Star had to say on the other side. At last the club began to empty, and as he had no possible excuse for remaining longer in it, he betook himself home, hoping that the scene which he anticipated with Annie would be deferred until the morrow.

"Has Lady Milson gone to bed yet?" were the first words he uttered to the servant who let him in, and he put that question in as unconcerned a tone as it was possible for him to assume.

"Her ladyship started for Brighton, Sir John, by the 8.30 train. She heard of her sister being taken very ill, and said that I was to give you this letter," was the reply of the butler, who, although perfectly respectful in his manner, seemed to know, by instinct as it were, that there was something wrong.

"Gone to Brighton?" exclaimed Sir John, who had never before realised what loneliness was, and who felt as if the home of the last thirty years had been broken down at a blow. "Gone to Brighton?" he asked again.

"Yes, Sir John. Her ladyship came home about seven o'clock, said she had heard of the sudden illness of her sister, and did not know where you were to be found, so I was to give you this letter when you came home."

The letter, which Sir John opened when he got to his study, was not a very long one, but it contained an enclosure which annoyed him perhaps even more than the letter itself.

After what I saw to-day, you will not be surprised at my leaving your house, which I feel, as you must, can no longer be my home. I go down to Brighton, and will send you my address when I get lodgings. When people of our age separate, the less scandal it is done with the better. I leave you to make out what story you like, and what money arrangements you deem fit. I do not, and shall not,

utter a word of reproach; nor do I wish to write you a sensational letter to attempt to recal you to what you once were. When, after being married more than thirty years, a husband behaves as you have done, he must do so with his eyes open. The enclosed I found to-day on the hall table. I opened it without thinking what I was doing, and find it confirms what I have for some time half suspected, and what to-day at the Crystal Palace showed me was the case. I shall not say another word.

A. M.

The enclosure was written in a large business-like hand, and ran as follows:

35, Little Bride-street, W.C.

May 18, 1865.

WESTERN *versus* MILSON.

Sir. We are instructed by our client, Mr. John Western, of 14, East-square, Kensington, to inform you that he has had several complaints from his tenants in East-terrace respecting the ladies for whom his house, No. 6, East-terrace, was taken in your name. Mr. Western was not aware at the time you took the house that you did not intend to inhabit it yourself. He has found out that neither of the ladies who do live there is your wife, and therefore, without going further into the question, begs that you will consider the agreement which was signed between you for your three years' tenancy of house as null and void, and that you will vacate the same with as little delay as possible. We are further instructed to state that, unless we receive from you within three days from this date a written engagement to vacate the said house on or before the 25th proximo, we are directed to proceed against you in an action of ejectment, but trust you will save us the necessity of so doing. This without prejudice.

We are, Sir, your most obedient Servants,

LANE AND BIRT,

Solicitors for Mr. Western.

To Major-General Sir John Milson, K.C.B.

"Pleasant, indeed," groaned Sir John to himself, after he had read the two letters; "pleasant, indeed, to have all this worry, not being myself in the very least to blame, but for having put myself very much out of the way in order to serve a friend. What is to be done?"

Sir John was not only not a selfish man, but was one who generally saw quickly what was his line of duty, and never hesitated to go through with it, however disagreeable it might be. In the present instance his devotion to his friend, and his determination not to betray the secret entrusted to him, had broken up his home, and would very soon make him a byword in the society in which he moved. To be more than suspected at sixty years of age of doing that which would be condemned in a married man of twenty, and to be accused of what he never was guilty of, were enough to annoy the best-tempered of men. Sir John had, in point of fact, made himself a martyr for an old friend; he had incurred the odium of wasting the savings of his long Indian service, and of wronging his wife in a way for which there could be no excuse, both of which accusations were equally unjust. He slept over the matter,

and could only come to the conclusion that his London house was the proper place for his wife to live in, and that, until matters were cleared up between them, he would vacate their comfortable home, and try to induce her to take up her abode in town. He therefore at once wrote to her to that effect, saying:

"However much appearances may be against me, believe me when I say, on my word of honour, that I am perfectly innocent of what you suspect. I will only ask one thing of you. Come back here as if nothing had happened. As it seems your determination that we should separate, I am the one who ought to leave our home. I don't wonder at what you have done, all I ask of you is to suspend your judgment until I have time to write a letter and receive an answer from India, when I pledge myself that you will find me perfectly innocent of anything but a somewhat inconsiderate consent to a very foolish request."

To Colonel Laber he wrote differently. After giving him an exact account of all that had happened, he concluded by begging that at any rate to his own wife he might be at liberty to tell all about the two young ladies whose guardianship he had undertaken. "It is utterly impossible for me to remain silent under the present imputation cast upon me," he went on to say, "and you, my dear Laber, are the only man who can relieve me from it. Even if you object to the world at large knowing that these girls are your illegitimate daughters, surely it would do you no harm, and the young ladies a vast deal of good, if at any rate one lady was acquainted with them, and could tender them the assistance and advice which only one of their own sex can offer. If you agree to my telling Annie all the history of which I have had for some months the exclusive knowledge, telegraph to me the word 'yes;' if you still adhere to your determination of keeping the whole affair secret, the word 'no' will acquaint me with your decision. But in the event of your persevering in the latter course, I must ask you to find another guardian for your girls, for I must leave England for good. I cannot remain in this country to be pointed at as an old roué, who at sixty years of age is faithless to his own wife, and has taken in his old age to a course of life of which he was innocent during his married youth and prime of life. I will keep your secret if you desire it, but it must be as an exile."

Milson had so much experience of his wife's good sense, that he was hardly surprised, although greatly pleased, when she wrote him from Brighton that his word was quite sufficient for her, and that she would return to London, take up her abode again with him, and wait for the reply to the letter of which he spoke. "Whatever happens," she wrote, "I will never be the first to create a scandal when you assure me that you are not guilty of what the world charges on you. I will not only return to town, but it would be better, if for a time, we

were to silence people by being seen more together than ever in public, and I have no doubt that in due time this mystery will be cleared up."

And it *was* cleared up. The telegram from Colonel Laber only reached London a week before his letter, but it contained the word "yes," and that very afternoon Sir John and Lady Milson drove down to Kensington and brought back the two girls and their governess to dinner. The Miss Fabers now go everywhere with Lady Milson, and it is believed that she has written to their father to say that if he will come home, and give up the idea of saving more money for their use, her husband and herself will adopt the girls during their life, and make them their heirs when they die. At any rate, the colonel—now major-general—is coming home, for his name is "up" for election at the Oriental Club, and Sir John Milson is ten years a younger man than he was six months ago. He is, however, of opinion, that had the untimely meeting at the Crystal Palace not taken place, he would not even yet be rid of his troubles; for he never would have persuaded his old friend to allow him to tell Lady Milson the very foolish secret of which he was the unwilling recipient, and the still more unwilling guardian.

EARLY WOOING.

I.

INDULGING in a retrospect,
My memory discovers
A time, that you may recollect,
When you and I were lovers.
And I remember well, you were
The best of little creatures,
With locks that clustered, thick and fair,
Round undeveloped features.

II.

Then you, my winsome little Fan,
As yet were barely seven;
And I a weather-beaten man
Of very near eleven,
Not much renown'd for anything,
A stranger to ecstasies,
Extremely fond of cricketing,
And not of mathematics.

III.

Such sympathy as you would show
I ne'er encounter'd after;
You wept right sore when I was low,
When happy, shook with laughter;
When I was punish'd, to my pain
Such kisses you accorded,
I hoped I should be flogged again
To be so well rewarded.

IV.

The day was fix'd—that is, I mean,
We vow'd, with kisses plenty,
To wed, when you were seventeen,
And I was one-and-twenty.
This sad delay was the result
Of calculations narrow:
I thought it might be difficult
To keep a wife at Harrow.

V.

Full twenty years have pass'd since then.
 You're married—more's the pity!
 Your husband, worthiest of men,
 Has business in the City.
 And lots of merry children press
 Around the knee maternal,
 Whose never-ceasing joyousness
 Is not at all supernal.

VI.

And I, on whatso'er I'm bent,
 From Camberwell to Carrick,
 While passing bills in Parliament,
 Or bottles at the Garrick,
 While lounging on the steps at White's,
 Or 'neath Tod Heatley's awning,
 Smoking a strong cigar o' nights,
 Or mild one in the morning—

VII.

Conversing "horse" with Tattersall,
 Or "shooting-coat" with Skinner,
 At Naples' public carnival,
 At Friendship's private dinner—
 Though but an ordinary man,
 Pleasure or gain pursuing,
 I've ne'er forgotten little Fan,
 And Childhood's early wooing.

ITALIAN MEN AND BROTHERS.

LAST week a German lady of rank and culture said to me, à propos of the present condition and prospects of Italy, "A liberal despotism is what is needed for these people. They are not to be trusted with self-government. The Italians have absolutely no sense of the 'point d'honneur.'"

It may be worth while at this moment, when so much is being said and written about Italy by declared enemies and—alas! too often—injudicious friends, to set forth a plain statement of facts which have come under my own knowledge, and which set the national character in a favourable light. My object is not to show that all virtue in this land is monopolised by Papalini or Mazziniani, supporters of the "extreme left," disciples of Menabrea, Rattazzi, or Garibaldi. What I believe, and what I desire to make others believe, is simply that, amongst these twenty-five millions of Italian-speaking men and women, there is an amount of human worth not inferior, in proportion to their numbers, to that of any other continental people. And here I must premise that I am well aware that human worth in Italy—at least in some parts of it—exists under conditions nearly as unfavourable to its development as those of a grain of wheat cast upon a stony soil, or sown in sand, or choked with foul weeds. And in *all* parts of the peninsula the soil has been for ages so ill cultivated as to be yet far from having regained its pristine fertility. On the other hand, I know, too, that the human plant must victoriously assert its right to flourish—by flourishing. To nations, at all events, we are forced to apply a portion of the Darwinian theory of natural selection, and say to the peoples, "Only those who *can* live, *may*."

Let us see, then—beginning with small particulars, and leaving to abler hands the task of rising to vaster generalities—how far my friend the German baroness was justified in her assertion that Italians have absolutely no sense of honour. Some sense of honour, some standard of principle, is, I suppose we are all agreed, as essential to a national existence in the great European family, as oxygen is essential to individual human life. A moral atmosphere so foul as to be absolutely without the vivifying presence of conscience, would speedily result in the material as well as spiritual ruin of a nation.

But I maintain that Italians, considering them broadly as a nation, are far—incalculably far—removed from any present approach to such a condition of moral asphyxia.

"In the first place," said my friend, who had recently been making a tour in the south, in Naples and Sicily—"in the first place, they hate this constitutional government, and grumble terribly at the taxes."

Now, I do not know enough of the internal condition of the Neapolitans under the old régime, to be able to form an accurate comparison between the burdens they had to support in the days of King Bomba and his successor, and the present taxes which are levied on them. The means of acquiring such accurate information are at my hand, but I purposely refrain from using them; firstly, because I have no pretension to make this paper a political essay; and secondly, because I am willing, for the purposes of my argument, to admit that the Neapolitans do "grumble terribly at the taxes." Granted. What then? They pay them. The majority, at least, pays the taxes without bloodshed, without martial law, without even a street row. I have heard of a country still reputed to have a foremost place amidst the nations, wherein tax-paying is not yet considered to rank among the few unalloyed pleasures of life. Under what conceivable circumstances can we picture to ourselves the hard-working householders of Manchester or Glasgow, or York or Exeter, so inflamed with patriotic fervour as to hold jubilee meetings to congratulate each other on the occasion of the income-tax being raised a penny in the pound?

Individual men will grumble—especially in Italy, where copious talk is the habitual safety-valve for carrying off peccant humours from the body politic—will grumble and fret, and make disadvantageous comparisons between the "good old times" and the bad new ones. But, nevertheless, there is a sound heart in the great mass of the nation that beats loyally for Italy, and is jealous of her glory and her prosperity—a heart that is noble enough to endure patriotic sacrifices, and tender enough to be pierced by national humiliation.

"But," says the German lady once more, "they are poor creatures. They get tête-montée with enthusiasm, but it turns out like the crackling of thorns under a pot. They cannot last. They have no constancy—no staying power."

To this I reply that, in the face of difficulties so overwhelming as to make the enterprise to calm on-looking eyes appear sheer madness, men of all ranks and classes, from the well-born, well-nurtured noble, to the humblest artisan and peasant, set themselves to encounter death and danger in the Roman states the other day, and within our absolute knowledge. I reply that of these men, many had already had painful experience of what a campaign really means. I reply that, although there certainly were in their ranks hundreds of enthusiastic boys whose imaginations were excited by immature and romantic dreams of glory, yet it is equally certain there were among them men who perfectly understood what it was they were going forth to encounter; who had known cold, and hunger, and fatigue, and squalid discomfort, and gunshot wounds, in their own persons. Men who had fought in '59, in '66; some even as far back as '48, and who, if they were able to shoulder a rifle, would be equally ready to fight in '68 or '88, or until the cause they have at heart were gained. Whatever we may think of their aim, or of the means they adopt to attain that aim, no impartial spectator of the facts can deny that these men are at least constant to their convictions; and I protest against the injustice of branding a nation which year by year produces such men, as "poor creatures" whose enthusiasm is as the brief crackling of thorns under a pot!

"But then," says the German lady, after some consideration, "I fear it cannot be contested that these Italians are wanting in self respect. They are not humiliated by the idea of being treated like beggars. They will ask alms and accept them without a blush."

Listen.

I have recently become a member of a committee of ladies in Florence, who, moved by the distress resulting from the late disastrous engagements in the Roman territory, have banded themselves together to do the womanly work of alleviating suffering, of ministering to the sick and wounded, of feeding the hungry, and clothing the naked. Such a body must, in the nature of things, be peculiarly liable to be selected as prey by the designing and unscrupulous. Surely if the Italians be so ready to make capital of their disasters, of their wounds, of their bereavements, as is represented, it is to us they will come with every chance of success. Now let us examine a little, not what they may have been supposed by this or that person to be likely to do under the circumstances, but what I am able to testify of my own knowledge they have done. The first case I shall quote is that of Angelo B., a house painter by trade, aged about three-and-twenty. Soon after our committee was established, this young man called one day at the house where we hold our meetings, and demanded to lay his case before us. He was admitted. There entered into a room full of ladies, all of a rank above his own, many of them foreigners, a handsome, manly-looking young fellow, wearing the traditional red shirt,

and leaning on a stick. He had been shot in the leg. A bullet had also passed through his right arm, which he carried in a sling. To say that he was easy and unembarrassed is merely to say that he was constitutionally free from the *mauvaise honte* which would in all probability have characterised an Englishman under similar circumstances. But there was more in his manner than this. There was the consciousness of a cause which he believed in—of a motive which we were, at least, bound to respect, if not to sympathise with. The preliminary inquiries having been satisfactorily replied to, we found that, although furnished with a certificate from a well-known surgeon, he had not a certificate signed by one of the five medical men whom we had named as our referees in all such cases. Then, too, although manifestly incapacitated for the present from following his trade, he was not in so dire a plight that we felt ourselves justified in breaking our rules to assist him.

Suddenly it occurred to one lady to ask if he were willing to *earn* a little money instead of receiving gratuitous assistance.

"I will do what I can," said he, looking significantly at his crippled limbs.

"I have some circulars to be delivered in the town, and will employ you to carry them, if you like," said the lady.

Some of the others demurred. They feared his lameness might be an obstacle. But the applicant himself overruled this objection.

"I shall go slowly, it is true," said he, "but in time—in time, I shall do the day's work."

It was then inquired what daily wages he could earn at his own trade, and on being told this, the lady who had offered to employ him said she would give him half the sum which he could gain at his own trade.

"Does that content you?" he is asked. "Do you think that enough?"

"It is more than enough," he answers.

Surely a very unskilful beggar this!

Angelo B. keeps his appointment, receives a list of houses at which he is to call, and sets forth to deliver his circulars. At the end of the day he returns, having delivered only two or three of them. He has lost the list, and asks for a fresh one. His day's pay is offered him, but he refuses to take it.

"No," says he, "I have not earned it. It is true it was more a misfortune than a fault my having lost the list, but still I have not earned my pay. Let me try again. To-morrow I may do better."

What an incredibly unskilful beggar!

About Angelo B. it is needful to say no more than this: that he satisfactorily fulfilled the mission he was set to do, bringing back upwards of a hundred francs in subscriptions to our treasury, as the result of his quest. He received the price that had been promised him, asked for nothing beyond his bargain, and, with the money thus earned, set off to return to his own dwelling-place, protesting stoutly that he hoped to serve his country better at some future time.

Another young applicant, whom I will call Carlo D., came to us to ask relief. What he chiefly needed was clothing. This, indeed, is the most general want. Many of the wounded men are unable to leave the hospitals, even when convalescent, for want of the barest necessities of clothing.

Carlo D.'s father had been an advocate in good practice. The young man himself had received the education of a gentleman. He appeared before the lady who benevolently gives the use of her house for the purposes of the committee, pale, suffering from a frightful wound, and absolutely in rags. So deplorable is his condition, that the Countess M. and her nieces then and there levy contributions on the wardrobes of the gentlemen of their family, and proceed to alter, to cut, and to sew together some garments to protect the wounded boy from the cold.

He stood there silent, gazing from one to another of the kind women who, scarcely less agitated than himself, were endeavouring to supply his wants. Suddenly the poor boy clasped his hands before his face, burst into a passion of tears, and sobbed out, "Oh, I am ashamed! I am ashamed!"

Here is a young heart not altogether destitute of self-respect, I venture to submit! His countrywoman, relating the story with tears of sympathy, strange to say expressed no astonishment at the existence of such a feeling in an Italian breast. She evidently considered it to be a natural ebullition, and one which she perfectly comprehended; which fact leads us, I suppose, to the inference that self-respect is not entirely an exotic in Italy after all! But stay. If it be not self-respecting to acknowledge a benefit, then I must confess that such a humiliating thing as open, ungrudging gratitude does exist amongst these children of the South. If to be ashamed of giving thanks for what one is not ashamed of receiving, to ask surlily, to accept sulkily, and secretly to hate the hand outstretched in charity—if these things be any evidence of self-respect, then, alas! I am bound to acknowledge that *that* kind of independent spirit I have not hitherto found in Italians. Only yesterday, at a full assembly of our committee, a wounded man, who had received succour, craved admission to the presence of the ladies. Of course to ask for further aid? By no means.

For what possible purpose, then? Simply to show himself to them in the decent clothing which they had substituted for his blood-stained tattered garments; to give them the pleasure of seeing with their own eyes the result of their good work, and to thank them for their timely help as best he knew how. Yes; this young man (who had been, by the way, a cavalry soldier in the regular army, and had been discharged as consumptive!) came and stood before us in a square soldierly attitude, and expressed in his mobile Italian face the thanks which his tongue had not courage or skill to utter. Of so poor and base a temper was his spirit, that

he actually conceived it to be no degradation to his manhood to appear before these benevolent women in the clothes with which their charity had furnished him!

That the poor help the poor is an old observation, and, I believe, equally applicable to all countries. Here, in Florence, we have met with touching instances of its truth. Many of the wounded volunteers, whose case is not so desperate as to require hospital treatment, find shelter under the roof of friends, themselves so poor as to be obliged to labour hard for their daily bread. Food sufficient to sustain life, and a roof over their heads, is seldom denied to them. Medical care they receive gratuitously at the hands of that profession of healing which honourably distinguishes itself in works of benevolence all the world over. But clothing! There is their difficulty, and in this respect the ladies' committee is able to be peculiarly useful. More than one instance has occurred of an applicant coming to us in a suit of clothes borrowed from a friend, which friend, we were given to understand, was, meanwhile, necessarily condemned to a very close retirement in his chamber! Some one asked me the other day, with a shade of contemptuous incredulity, "Well, but what has become of the clothes these volunteers had before? They did not, surely, proceed to the campaign totally naked!"

Quite true. They were clothed, though probably not well clothed. But garments clotted with gore and mud, burnt by powder, and slashed by bayonet-thrusts, are neither pleasant nor comfortable wear. In many cases the men were taken off the field with scarcely a rag left on them. The majority of these volunteers belong to the class which we English emphatically designate as "working men." To a working man in full employ, the purchase of a suit of clothes is matter for long consideration and weeks of saving. To a man who has (whether judiciously or injudiciously I do not here discuss) thrown himself not only out of present work, but out of the *groove* in which he was likely to find it, the acquisition by his own efforts of warm winter clothing is simply an impossibility.

The spirit of the men in hospital, whether here or in Rome, is, by all accounts, excellent. One man, on being asked if he had not suffered terribly in undergoing a severe operation, replied, "Oh, it was bad. But the doctors are very skilful and very quick. The pain is not the worst. The real hardship in hospital is to see your comrades suffer. That is terrible."

Could the bravest British tar who ever fought under Nelson have spoken more manfully, and, at the same time, tenderly? Not that these poor lads are made of the same stuff as Nelson's hearts of oak were made of. Physically, they are smaller, slighter, and weaker. Morally, more impressionable and impulsive. Habitually, less accustomed to measure their lives by a standard of duty. Still there is in them some nobleness which has been brought forth by suffering, and the encounter with death.

"Danger ennobles," you tell me, "and the men must be poor creatures indeed who will whine about bodily pain, and descant on their physical sufferings after they are over!"

Well, but I am constantly being told that these Italians *are* poor creatures, and, as to the ennobling effects of danger—danger may elicit nobility, but cannot surely create it. From a poltroon, danger will get—nothing but poltroonery. As a specimen of the feeling with which these volunteers are regarded by the mass of their countrymen (be it observed parenthetically that this feeling does not necessarily imply approval of the recent rash invasion of the Roman territory), I subjoin the literal translation of a letter addressed to a lady of our committee, and enclosing the silver medal alluded to. Both are now in our possession. The following is a faithful copy of the letter, merely suppressing the name of the writer and the town whence he writes. The letter itself will best explain why I have deemed it prudent, in the interests of the writer, not to reveal these:

"Honoured Madam. I have not large means wherewith to help my brothers wounded by the myrmidons of the Napoleonic gang, and of the Pope-King of the Roman territory. I was thinking of selling some article or other, in order that I, too, might assist in so patriotic and humane a subscription, when it occurred to me that I possessed the commemorative medal of the War of Independence in 1859, which was given to us by the Signor Bonaparte (*sic*). The said medal being even more abhorrent to me than that of Pius the Ninth—or, at least, quite as much so—I send it to you in order that you may have it sold for the benefit of my wounded brothers before mentioned.

"Receive, honoured madam, the expression of my profound respect.

"Your obliged servant,

"B. B.

"———, 26th November, 1867."

This simple soldier requested us to publish his letter in the Italian papers, under the impression that it would induce many others to follow his example! For obvious reasons we have declined to comply with this desire, although accepting his well-meant gift, which will be purchased as a *curiosity* by one of our committee. The medal bears the names of Montebello, Turbigo, Marignano, and Magenta. It would answer no good purpose to extend the limits of this little paper. It is meant to have—as I have previously stated—no political colour whatsoever. The instances of manliness and good feeling which I have given—and for the absolute truth of which, let me repeat, I can unhesitatingly vouch—are drawn from among the volunteers, for the sole and simple reason that they alone, being totally unprovided for by any public fund, naturally have recourse to private charity, and it is with them, therefore, that we chiefly come in contact.

The above facts do not, of course, prove that

the Italians are paragons of virtue, any more than less creditable facts—which, alas! no doubt might be collected in quantity—would prove them to be monsters of vice. But they at least *disprove* the sweepingly contemptuous assertion that there is no good thing to be expected from this people. I have no pretension to exalt the Italians into heroes; but I do most heartily desire that the world—and especially the English world—should know them to be men!

CALLED OVER THE COALS.

A DIRTY, straggling mark on a swampy field, a disused footpath which the coarse grass is rapidly covering, a strip of soil black and swart as the flooring of the wretched cellars in which thousands of poor Londoners pine and die—such is the view which we have driven miles to see. A narrow slip of land, a few feet wide and not many yards long, uncultivated, ugly, and useless, the place is now pointed out to us as worth more thousands of pounds than would buy an estate in the country, or build and endow a roomy block of almshouses. It seems rather dear at the money. Do what you would, you couldn't grow as many vegetables on it the year round as may be purchased any morning in Covent Garden for a shilling; and yet it literally caused the thousands I speak of to be diverted from one set of pockets into another, and that within twelve months from the present time. This dirty pathway virtually settled the great arbitration case between Canal and Coal, and was the final straw which broke the typical camel's back, and made Coal triumphant. The aqueduct overhead, or rather some of the miles of water it is connected with, were, on the one hand, accused of injuring the adjacent coal-pits, and, on the other, held up as agreeable aquatic neighbours, incapable of harm. Coal insisted it was aggrieved, Canal stoutly maintained its innocence, and it was the untoward appearance of a closed-in fissure which virtually gave the crowning point to the victory of Coal. The most sceptical were convinced, when the earth opened at their feet, that there might be something in the allegations as to "workings" being injured, and foundations and roof-trees giving way; and the upshot of it all was that the skilled arbitrators gave a rational verdict, and adjudged Canal to pay damages.

It was in a "hall by the sea," of a very different character to the one advertised, that I saw the arbitrators at work last year, and an uncommonly snug, cozy, profitable business arbitrating seemed to be. "Costs a cool hundred an hour, sir; has been on for a fortnight, and will last for several days longer, believe me. They're all at lunch now; don't begin till ten; always take lunch, 'thinking over the evidence,' they call it; leave early in the afternoon; stay at the best hotels; have everything that's most expensive; horses and carriages found them, and are paid handsomely into the

bargain. Only have it here, at Barborough, because it's a pretty place, and in vacation time it doesn't matter to the lawyers where the chambers are in which they earn fees. All the hotels were fighting to have them, but none of the rooms were large enough, so they took this hall at an exorbitant price, and occupy it alternately with horse-trainers, itinerant showmen, and the watering-place band. All the books on the orchestra-table yonder are plans, and maps, and estimates; the mouths of the pits—and precious hungry mouths many of them seem to be—the workings of the shafts, and the direction of the waters, have all been explained, and contradicted, and explained again. The arbitrators look wise as owls, and ask a question now and then, to keep up appearances. One of them, you see, is already listening with his eyes shut, and will afterwards go up to the hotel and, I suppose, go odd man among themselves as to which way they shall decide. Can't please both parties, of course; and as it's not like a prize-fight, where the umpires are battered by the losers, they can sleep with easy minds, take their port after dinner, their sea-bathing in the morning, and be happy."

Thus the sea-side gossip, whose acquaintance I have made at a Barborough table d'hôte, professes to represent the public opinion of the promenade. That any set of people should deliberately set themselves to useful work in this lovely, idle, flirting, scandal-mongering pleasure-place, is to the ball frequenters and promenade loungers so great a marvel that they feel positively annoyed. Industry is resented as a slur upon the habits of the community, and the arbitration party are all canvassed in a cynical spirit by the flaunting damsels and their week-old adorers, who consider Barborough their own.

Many months later, and in a thoroughly coal county, I happen to be told of the fissure in the ground called "the crack," and am asked to remember the "Barborough arbitration, which it settled, you know." It is part of the hospitable routine of the house I am staying at to ride or drive daily, and two friends and myself—after having driven along black roads and pathways, made of what is called "slack" in Derbyshire, and "small coals" in the county we are in—leave "the crack" to the right, and stop at a neat little red house to ask for the sub-manager of the coal-pits. He is away; so we proceed to the pit counting-house, where a young gentleman hospitably insists that we shall go to his lodgings and be refreshed. I now hear it proposed that we shall descend one of the coal-pits, and my strongest emotion is a desire to run away. My two companions represent respectively the qualities of Vigour and Curiosity, and I know there will be little hope of escaping from a long routine of exploration if I once consent to go down. Warily but jauntily, as if opposition were out of the question, I remark, therefore, that "I'll just stroll as far as Yedingham-on-the-Hill, while you're down, you

know, and will have a sketch of the view ready by your return." Had I proposed something dishonourable or dishonest, I could not have roused a fiercer storm! Why should I break up the party when I'd pretended so much interest in the subject, and the trip had been made to gratify me? Which of us had talked through dinner yesterday, and before the girls (a sneer here), of the Barborough arbitration; and who induced them to drive out to see "the crack" directly he found its history and its bearing on the case. Besides, why should I hold back? What was there to fear? Clothes? A regular pit-dress would be furnished me. Heat, smoke, confined air, accidents? Surely I'd heard of the law of averages, and knew how utterly impossible it was that anything should happen—I shuddered—while we were down. In vain I protested that I didn't want to go, and didn't care to reason upon it. Vigour clapped me on the back; and Curiosity reminded me that I ought not to miss an opportunity of acquiring information. I agreed with a heavy heart to give up my pleasant walk and sketching, and to proceed with the others to our young friend's lodgings in the little town adjacent. A very funny little town we find it to be. Its brick houses are the colour of boiled lobsters, and its roadway the hue of lobsters in their native state. It consists of one empty street, and two rows of back-doors, the houses of which straggle up a steep hill like a company of soldiers in Indian file. One or two women are at the upper windows, summoned there by the strange sound of footsteps; and one artificially black man may be seen in the middle distance coming home to sleep; but there is no other sign of life. The little tavern has not a single lounge at its door. The druggist's shop is drowsiness personified; while its plenteous display of feeding-bottles, cordials, and soothing syrups, is not without its bearing.

The population is at work under our feet, or in bed recruiting after and preparing for night-work of the same burrowing kind. On reaching his home, our host and guide leaves us for a moment, and returns a pantomimic gnome. A tightly-fitting skull-cap of greasy leather, with protections for the side-face, which stick out like monstrously hideous ears, a suit of dark blue flannel, dingy with use and coal-dust, and without either beginning or end, but which seems to have been sewn bodily upon the frame it covers, and a nose and cheeks which are liberally smutted, make the illusion complete; and to say we expected our guide to give a "back-flapper," and disappear in the bowels of the earth, or to take a first-floor window flying, or to suddenly become a "wheel," is to give a very common-place rendering of the high-flown expectations his appearance caused. A certificate, showing him to have passed the Cambridge middle-class examination, photographs of engines and pit-gear, and a well-selected stock of professional books, all bore testimony to the opposite character of

his pursuits; but there was no resisting his appearance in this new dress, and Curiosity, Vigour, and myself waited open-mouthed for him to begin. This he did very pleasantly and kindly by clothing us in similar fashion to himself, and by preceding us to the pit's mouth. We have, in our new dress, severally become hideous by this time. Vigour looks like one of the "bold smugglers," who have disappeared lately, but who were formerly celebrated for vending choice Whitechapel Havannahs up dark archways, or at the corners of deserted streets. Curiosity has become a scoundrel of the deepest dye—a man upon whose appearance any intelligent jury would convict. And I am worthy of the company I am in.

It is a lovely day, and our courteous young guide—the Gnome—rapidly points out the leading features in the landscape as we skirt the hill lying between the town and the pits. These features are of coals coaley. The country is obscured by smoke. Huge scaffoldings, like mammoth witches' spinning-wheels, spring up to right and left as far as eye can reach, and each denotes a pit's mouth. The mansions seen are the residences of coalowners or their agents, and both the ground we walk upon and the air we breathe are redolent of coal. Arriving at the head of the pit, we are introduced to begrimed men resembling the estimable persons who deliver coals and count sacks upon the pavements of dear London. They are deputy "viewers," foremen, and colliers; and one of the latter says gruffly, "Them as would go down a pit for pleasure would go to" (terrific noun substantive) "for pastime," in reply to my innocent questions as to the condition of the "workings" below.

Meanwhile, Curiosity asks questions of two twins, who are brother viewers, and so much alike that they seem to have studiously blacked their faces to the same extent, for when they smile identical streaks of white are visible. Vigour, who knows all about pits, and is a favourite with the men, whispers some instructions, and, with a mischievous look I don't half like, bids me come with him in the cage. It is too late to retract; besides, I am stung by the contemptuous smiles of the grimy people clustered round us; so, with a quaking heart and as resolute a countenance as I can muster up, I make for what seems to be an infernal machine close by. Curiosity delivers cynical and irritating remarks on my appearance, which I privately vow to avenge, and Vigour first punches me into a sort of ball (I am neither tall nor strong), and then rolling me between his feet, calls "All right" with suspicious cheerfulness. Curiosity, the Gnome, and one twin are with us in the infernal machine, and now my misery culminates. With a tremulous, uneasy motion the whole apparatus descends, and we seem to pass down a chimney which has been recently on fire. The air is hot and suffocating, as if bad lucifer-matches were constantly burnt in it. It is pitch dark. Large flakes of wet soot fall upon my face and

hands and limbs, and over and above the close stench natural to the place, my respiration is impeded by Vigour's knees. Meanwhile the stench and heat come athwart us in great gusts until I am sick and faint, and devoutly hoping my tormentors are suffering too, I ask meekly "whether it will be as bad as this all the time." "Halfway down," cries Vigour, as we meet another cage in the darkness; and my involuntary "Thank Heaven!" is the signal for exultant chuckles from every one in the cage. A slight shock, which makes me start, a great rattling of chains, the tramp of hooved feet, lights flashing out from a dense impenetrable blackness, wild shrieks, cries, and shouts from boys, the clank of harness and machinery, come next, and obeying a kick from Vigour, who then pulls me out as if I were an opera-glass, I step into an agreeable quagmire, composed apparently of pounded coal and London mud. We are at the bottom of the pit, and behind those closed doors "the workings" extend round us in every direction, much as if the maze at Hampton Court had been buried underground, and its trim hedges turned into coal. "The first thing," said the Twin accompanying us, a stolid man without much pity or humour, "the first thing is to 'get your eyes,' and we'll go into the cabin for that." A new sort of lamp, I whisper to myself, the last improvement upon Davy, and called "eyes" to denote its usefulness. But it means that we are to become partially acclimatised to the strange darkness before sallying out into it; so still devoutly wishing myself at home, I join the rest. We sit mum-chance in a little kennel, and put our lamps behind us to make the light resemble the pitchy blackness outside. This lasts a quarter of an hour, when we sally out one by one into a subterranean thoroughfare of coal. The tramway at our feet rests on coal; the walls at our side are coal; the roof above us is coal. Burrowing like rabbits, and occasionally stooping double for yards, we arrive at the engine-room, which is as profoundly uninteresting as engine-rooms always are to me. It is humid, greasy, and warm; and bells ring, and "endless chains" are worked, and the pistons shown us, and we say, "Beautiful, beautiful!" as people do when they contemplate machinery they don't understand. Then we are shown "faults"—where the vein of coal has suddenly broken off, and hard stone has taken its place. Then more chains and horses, and shouting boys. Empty and laden trucks pass rapidly to and fro upon the tramway, and the Twin chooses the narrowest part of the dismal path, to favour me with an anecdote concerning some man who was killed last week by meeting a truck unexpectedly, and "getting flattened to the pit-side like a pancake."

But my attention never leaves the demoniacal dark figures who emerge fitfully out of the blackness as if generated by the coal—figures which move lightly, utter wild cries,

and fall back again into the darkness. I became afraid. I have no hesitation in admitting it, now that I am secure from the strong and practically jocular arm of Vigour and the conceited smirks of Curiosity. Our guide, the Twin, had passed the door of "the cabin," and led us many yards astray before we reached it. Was that reassuring? Was the "I've spent my life in these workings, and never did such a thing afore," put forth with as much confidence as if it were an explanation of the fact, tended to soothe my alarm? Suppose the Twin were to lose his way further on in the pit? Suppose he lost me? Suppose our lights went out? No man, I firmly believe, ever admired the eloquence or dramatic genius of Sheridan with half the fervour I now mentally bestowed upon what then seemed to me his greatest speech—"Descend a coal-pit for the sake of saying you've been down? Can't you say so without going?"

But there is no shirking the programme laid down by Vigour, and we are borne to a fiery furnace next. I don't profess to fully understand its use, for I was too hot and flurried to comprehend the Twin's explanation. It is connected in some way with the purification of pit-air, and with "up-casts" and "down-casts" and "shafts." To be forcibly held before a fierce fire (as if there were any enjoyment or information in being singed), upon which a few bullocks and a moderately sized flock of sheep might be roasted whole, does not aid your comprehension of its use. During this torture, Curiosity stood in a cool corner, and chuckled, "How very interesting!" A couple of hours of unalloyed wretchedness followed. I am neither awkwardly tall, like Curiosity, nor inconveniently broad, like Vigour, but am, I flatter myself, what milliners call "a neat figure;" yet I knocked and bruised myself terribly against chains, and roofs, and trucks. We never stand upright, and occasionally have to wriggle on our stomachs like eels. Here and there we are shown "faults," in which I assume deep interest, having a hidden fear that, if I fail to conciliate Twin and Gnome, they will leave me behind. "Two old men lost here for two days last summer," says the Twin, philosophically; "went to look for them arter the second night missing, and found them sitting quite comfortable, saying 'it wasn't much use hollering down here, and they know'd they should be fetched.'" I learn with a shudder that these men had worked here since their youth, and, clutching Vigour's pea-jacket firmly, I show increased alacrity in obeying the Gnome's monotonous cry, "Come along." A villainous hole, in which you are shut like a trap, and where you inhale every variety of baked stench,—a steep chimney communicating with the pit's main shaft, and in which you feel like a salamander, and from which you emerge as completely "cured" as the finest Wiltshire bacon, is the next form of misery. Following on this, we are shown at the end of one subterranean

turning a loose bank of coals like the side of a pyramid, in which we sink to our middle, and up which the Gnome plods with Vigour at his heels, to wave lamps excitedly at the top, and to ask, with exultation, if I saw "the lights," as if a feeble moving glimmer on a section of a London coal-cellar were a spectacle calculated to fill all souls with joy. The stables, containing a really fine set of horses, in good condition, clean, carefully groomed, and comfortable, are shown next; and a thorough-bred, who has been guilty of repeated bad behaviour, and who arrived down yesterday, sentenced to underground servitude for life, is critically examined. These stables are distributed about the "workings," and are clinks in the walls of coal, roomy and well appointed with racks, mangers, straw, and other adjuncts to equine comfort. Horses seldom see daylight again when they are once set down to pit work, but live and die in one round of truck-dragging and tramway-walking, in which the solitary variation is from "fulls" to "empties," and from "empties" to "fulls" again.

Up to this time we have only seen the product of the miners' labours, not the miners themselves. Every moment I expected to find myself in the central coal depôt—which, in my imagination, is a lofty cavern, wherein gangs of labourers are busily at work. After crawling and crouching along the windings, one by one, keeping firm hold of either Vigour or the Twin, I am told to "look at the way the coal is got." It is more than a minute before I discern anything. Then a poor and fitful glimmer, such as might proceed from a glow-worm of weak constitution, becomes visible through the intense gloom. A monotonous tick, tick, as from a magnified death-watch, is perceptible at the same time; and then, as we creep nearer, something small and drab, like a white hat-brush, is seen to be moving to and fro in mid air, and keeping time to the ticks. There is nothing else to break the vast black pall we are piercing. The sickly glowworm and the restless hat-brush are but dimly seen, and appear to be at an enormous distance from where we crawl, and at the end of a long vista of coal. The ticks, although sounding sharp and clear, do not prevent our coming to close quarters with the being causing them, while we are still speculating where he is. It was the most curious optical effect I have known, for there was absolutely no transition between what seemed to be a distant view and our almost stumbling over the nigrescent creature at our feet. The glowworm was a safety-lamp, stuck on a ledge in the coal above him; the drab hat-brush was a few inches of flesh near this Ethiop's arms, not encrusted in black, and which naturally moved backwards and forwards as its owner plied his pickaxe and enlarged the cavity he crouched in. The central hall of my imagination resolved itself into a solitary tomb. This was the only miner we saw at work; though the Twin assured us there were some three hundred and fifty in the pit

at that time, all of whom were engaged like the one before us. Scooping out the coal, and sitting in the place he scooped, chipping dexterously at the ceiling of his cell, so that the droppings fell clear of his own body, he looked like some gigantic fossil endowed with life and struggling to free himself from his stony bed, or a supernatural black hermit digging his grave out of the solid rock. My nerves were a little shaken by the treatment I had been exposed to, and the very disagreeable hours I had spent, and it quite seemed that the fuliginous object before us was something more or less than human—a conviction which only received its death-blow by Vigour borrowing a shilling of me, which the pitman cleverly caught in his mouth, promising, with a hoarse chuckle, to drink our healths directly he came out of this thirsty place.

While sitting again in the cabin before ascending, the pit poet was introduced to us, and immediately recited an apparently interminable poem, of which I only remember these eloquent and soul-stirring lines :

It was the (blank) day of December,
The fact I will relate,
That forty-eight poor colliers
Went meeting of their fate;

and so on for a hundred stanzas. "Made it himself," remarks the Twin, gravely—"made it himself while he was at work;" and when we proffer a small money gift, it is acknowledged by the strongest blessing it has been my fortune to hear. After holding the coin in his palm and bestowing on it the orthodox exhortation, the poet shouts with a rough genuflection to the donor, "May You (in very large capitals) Have Ten Thousand weer yer now have One; may Heaven bless yer, and the Devil neglect yer; and (more rapidly this) "may the master of all the camp, and pioneers of (Place Unmentionable) keep with yer! (disappearing from the cabin door into the darkness). Amen." This batch of good wishes, delivered with feverish rapidity, took our breath away, and it was only after a few seconds had passed that we began to ask each other whether we were not so many jackdaws of Rheims, who had been heartily banned rather than blessed. Whereupon the poet, who, we afterwards learnt, was a cracked-brained fanatic, was called back, and repeated, without a single addition or variation, the same words, disappearing as before at the end. Again brought before us, we learnt that the master of "all the camp and pioneers" was meant for Providence, to whose keeping we were fervently consigned. We reach the blessed daylight, "the crack," and the aqueduct, soon after this, and standing at the pit-head limp, blackened, moist, and miserable, I learn that I have been half stifled unnecessarily, and that our going into foul-air chambers, and down warm, hot, unsavoury, and greasy shafts, has been due to Vigour's determination to "give me a treat." Curiosity's smiles be-

tray him as an accomplice. My revenge is in this exposure, and my advice to my readers is—remember what Sheridan said.

THE DEAR GIRL.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "BELLA DONNA," "NEVER FORGOTTEN," &c.

CHAPTER XXVIII. A WARNING.

It was now coming to the night of the Guernsey Beauforts' ball. These distinguished strangers had indeed taken the best way of silencing the ungenerous and ungrateful who had been feasted by them, and who would yet go about whispering their malignant slanders. Even the upholsterer, who had uttered some threats, and been so disrespectful as to ask for a settlement in a rude blunt way, fiercely and dramatically saying he had a family, and would not be ruined for any people with the clothes of gentlemen on (a rumour had reached him and turned him wild), *he* became repentant, and was grovelling at Guernsey Beaufort's feet. That gentleman received him with a surprising sweetness :

"My poor friend, you cannot help it. I can make all allowances. You must be on your guard. I do not blame *you*; but I wish really you would take away these things of yours; they are a little old-fashioned, and if I had listened to advice I should have got everything in your way from my old friend Moisson, at Paris; but I wished to benefit the place I was living in. No matter now; we must get on as well as we can."

"Oh, sir—Sir Beaufore—you overwhelm me," said the repentant upholsterer.

"Not at all. But, I tell you fairly, I mean to be out of your books at once. My agent is coming over here on Friday, and I shall hand you all over to him."

After this, it may be conceived with what alacrity the artisan bestirred himself. The room in the *établissement* had been sumptuously decorated. Mr. Beaufort's taste was pronounced excellent and charming; no expense was spared, and it was owned that these strange English, after all, had redeeming merits.

There was misery enough in that tinsel-looking colony, yet it may be doubted if there were two such heavy hearts as were to be found in the rooms that looked on the Place. The two women, Margaret and Constance, looked on the struggle that he was suffering from, or rather the hopeless acquiescence that was in his face. Yet they were obliged to affect to see nothing, and his efforts to be indifferent and take interest in what was going on, wrung them still more. Latterly, he had begun to complain of a heaviness in the head. "I dare say it is coming at last; and what a release for you from this feeble, unmanly, infatuated creature, who is ashamed of himself and of his life!"

Margaret had long ceased to reason with him. Her hard, cold features were growing sterner

every day. She and Constance held dismal conferences over what was nearest to their hearts. "If something only would happen; something one way or the other. Something must and *shall* be decided one way or the other. He shall not be destroyed for her caprice. Let her marry this man at once, in God's name, and remove this curse from among us." One morning, seeing her brother sitting there pale, hopeless, and rapidly gliding into illness or perhaps mental alienation, something like an inspiration seemed to come to her, and she left the room and went out into the street.

It was about ten o'clock, and Lucy was sitting at the window, thinking over a charming dress which lay on a sofa there, a present for the coming ball, which some mysterious enchanter had sent in, saw with wonder the stiff and sad-coloured figure of Margaret West pass into Vivian's house. Nor did it pass out again until nearly an hour had gone by. She could not but notice the change in Margaret's appearance, and she actually saw beyond mistake the look of triumph and defiance that Margaret cast upwards at her window. The little heart fluttered. Her breath began to come and go. "She means me and him some mischief. She would do anything for her brother. What can it mean?"

She would not have been more surprised than was Vivian when the gaunt form of Margaret was before him. She spoke in her old hard, stern way:

"This is the last thing you looked for, I dare say—the last thing I should have thought of; but it has become a duty for me. I have come to ask a favour from you."

Vivian, much relieved, answered, with alacrity, that he should be delighted, and that he was glad she had come to him.

"Don't think my brother has sent me; he knows nothing of this. You see the state he is in—a sensible, strong-minded man, reduced to a miserable pitiable condition by the heartlessness of a thoughtless girl."

"This is the old folly," said Vivian, warmly. "And I am glad you have mentioned it, that we may dispose of it at once and for ever. What is this about heartlessness and cruelty? Put it at the worst, she was a child fresh from school; he a man that might be her father; and even if she *did* change and was a little capricious—"

"I am not come to discuss *that*," she said, coldly. "That mischief is done—whoever has done it. I want to save something out of the wreck. Tell me this, why do you not end this miserable suspense which is destroying us all? How many months has this been going on? You have won her heart, you will tell me. If you *are* such a devoted lover, you would have been married to her long ago. But I believe yours is a soldier's, a garrison love, and it is said in this place you are seeking some excuse for retreat."

Margaret's eye was resting on him to see the

effect of this speech. He answered her with a burst:

"As I live, no, no, no! And I will say, also, that you, Miss West, do not believe in what you have said. As for the retailed stories of this place, neither Lucy nor I cares for them."

"Then why these excuses, why this delay, unless"—and again Margaret's cold eye was on him—"unless the shadow of some old love has risen up and come between? Old pledges are awkward. The gossip of this place sometimes travels far; and if there was danger of such an awkward intrusion during the ceremony—"

He walked about impatiently.

"This is going much too far," he said. "I have borne your inquisition too long. Politeness to a lady, and pity for your situation, alone made me bear so much. I must tell you, I do not accept the view of what you call your brother's folly. To me it seems too gentle a name for a spiteful and sour heart; and if he has sent you here to pry into my affairs, or to question me about them—"

"Or," said she, suddenly seizing him by the wrist, and turning him to the light, "could it be that *you are bound to a wife already*? Ah! your face answers me, and I hold the secret!"

If a gasping voice, a blanched cheek, and the trembling arm she had clutched were evidence, then she *had* his secret. But the dramatic start of the situation would have scared many a sober man.

"What terms," she cried, in exultation—"what terms do you make? Or what terms do I give you?—for I can dictate. It is the truth, as I live. You cannot look at me. You are shaking from head to foot. Ah, this explains all—delay, indecision, mournful looks. You cannot speak to me. You cannot falter out your story."

He did falter out, "This is a wild speech of yours. Any one can say such a thing. You are as foolish as your brother."

"Right, right," said she, pacing backward and forward and speaking to him; "words are nothing. We must have proof—proof and facts. They will come—I shall find them. From this hour I shall watch, hunt, prove; to those who watch and search, proof comes of itself. Now I have something to live for. And now I know there is a good and gracious Being over us all. It was an inspiration sent from heaven. I leave you now."

Vivian's manner had of a sudden changed; a sort of desperation was in his face. He crossed over between her and the door. "No; not with this wild story to be sent among the scoundrels of this place. Take care; I shall not have my life and happiness destroyed by a slander sent abroad by a revengeful woman and a rejected rival."

"Fear nothing," she said. "I can wait till the proper time. There shall be no stories, but all facts. I shall watch with delight to see what you will do. You are in a delicious dilemma. Dacres will hold you to your pledge,

and not give you ten days more. This is retribution indeed!"

He was so overwhelmed by this torrent of words, that he stood looking at the excited woman unable to murmur a word. At last, as she was turning to go, he said, faintly, "You could not be so base——"

"What, it is true, then?" she said, quickly.

He stamped his foot impatiently. "Leave me. I defy you—both you and him. Do your worst. Only take care what a load of sin will be on your head if you drive me to extremities."

Margaret made no reply, but went down smiling to herself. When she was in the street, it was then that Lucy, watching anxiously at the window, though unseen herself, saw the unmistakable look of defiance and triumph. Her heart sank; she knew not why, but she had an instinct that it was associated with that darling casket where she had garnered up her treasure.

For the whole of the day that followed she did not see Vivian, and in the evening, when she did—he had come over—he seemed quite changed, moody and dejected. But he never mentioned the visit that had been paid to him that morning. Harco had gone out to the play—"he wanted a fillip"—so they were alone.

"You have heard some bad news?" said this Dear Girl, not a little disquieted.

"What will you think of me," he said, "when I tell you that I am very wretched?"

"Why?" said Lucy, her eyes swimming with sympathy. "Ah! if you will only tell me!"

"Ah, there, there is the worst," he said, passionately; "I dare not. My dear sweet Lucy, up to this time we have been both in a dream, a dreadful dream. We do not know what we have been doing. I have been infatuated. We have been hurried on in a course which may bring ruin and misery on us all."

The alarm and grief in Lucy's face at this strange, unexpected declaration, may be conceived. "Oh! what does this mean?" she murmured; "what have I done? I know! They have been turning you against me. Don't listen to *her*. She hates me; *they* hate me, and would destroy me. Why did you listen to her? I knew she would set you against me."

The handsome face was softened at once. "If it be a dream, then it is a most delightful one. I could wish I might never awake. Oh, if I could only tell you all. But no one can understand—if I had only breathing-time——"

"For what?" said Lucy.

"You cannot understand," he said, sadly.

"If I should go away without our being married, you know what would be said. The creatures here would fall on your dear name and tear it to pieces. And your father? Yet, if you only loved me as I love you, you could trust me—you could believe in me. And as I stand here, the sole motive is one for your sake, and for our happiness; no other in the world."

Lucy's face brightened in a moment. "And is that the difficulty? Then why not do so? It will be a dreadful thing for me to lose you; but I trust in you, and I love you, and I ask no

confidence. I know it is for our common sakes. I shall wait—wait for years, if you wish it; for your life is mine, and your interest mine. The only thing is," and her face fell—"is papa. He *does* mind so much what people say. And," she added, naively, "he is so suspicious. But I shall try and bring him over, and I know I shall succeed."

This Dear Girl was so full of confidence, and hope, and trust, that she quite inspired her lover with the same feelings. The air cleared again, the sun came out. The brightest and softest of landscapes lay before them both.

"You are a dear, dear one, indeed," he said. "And, besides, all this difficulty may vanish in a week, a day, an hour; nay, even now I know not what news this day's post may bring us. It is all on the turn of a card."

"And whatever way the card turns," said Lucy, smiling, "I am content. Only tell me *this* much of the secret: has not she, Margaret West, something to do with this?"

His face turned a little pale. "She is a dangerous and a dreadful woman, and, I fear, has found out a way to harass us. But I shall baffle her yet."

CHAPTER XXIX. A CURIOUS DISCOVERY.

OUR Lucy, thus wrapped up in the exciting little drama of which she was the heroine, little dreamed how tongues outside were still busy with her fair name. The matrons and virgins who disliked her had grown more than usually virulent—first, because she took the air of propriety; and, secondly, because she had an admirer of substance, and had a chance of being established comfortably in the world, unless Providence interfered to show that the admirer was of the common material of the place—dust, ashes, and decay. They flung themselves on her slight figure; they tore her with their talons. It was agreed, in many a council, that the late proceeding was the most shocking and indelicate and disgraceful that could be conceived. Need it be added that in their keeping the story, whatever it was, had lost nothing; nay, had been distorted, daubed over with colours—the reds made to flame, the yellows to blaze, the whites to stare again? It was so serious, indeed, that Mr. Blacker was shocked, and, as public officer of moral health, felt bound to take official notice of it. In this he was all but encouraged by Mrs. Dalrymple, who had grown quite warm in the matter. "A cold, heartless little thing! The effrontery she looks at me, Mr. Blacker, as she passes us, leaning on that man's arm! She has no heart, I tell you, and she's killing that poor foolish West. He has death in his face."

Lucy, unhappily for herself, contributed to this view; for she really had begun to count Mrs. Dalrymple among her enemies, and could not restrain that look of defiance and resentment.

On the very day, then, of Margaret's visit to Vivian, Mr. Blacker put on a white tie of

extra stiffness and starch, and set out on public duty to call on Mr. Dacres. Lucy was sitting with her father, who was in rather an ill humour. One of his fits of pettish despondency had come upon him. He was wearing away like a rat in a hole. The curse of Swift was upon him. A man of his gifts and genius shut out in this way from his own walk, with a set of wretched fellows picking up his crumbs! Lucy went through the old immemorial formulas, and soothed, and petted, and reassured with her accustomed earnestness and success. Mr. Blacker entered; and the duty he had come for seemed written in his face. Almost at once he said:

"I want to speak to you a little, in private, Dacres; rather a serious thing."

"What the devil's up now?" said the agreeable Dacres, his face assuming a spiteful look. "What precious news have you got?"

"It is for your private ear, Dacres; so I will ask the young lady, your daughter, to leave us a few moments together. It is really of importance."

"What are you at now?" said Mr. Dacres, scowling at him. "I want no secrets here."

Lucy, however, had stolen off to "poor mamma."

"Now speak out, and have done with it."

"The fact is this," said Mr. Blacker; "some—ahem!—rather unpleasant stories have been going about here."

"Well, you are an original fellow! So you come here laden with unpleasant stories of the place! Much obliged to you."

"It is rather serious, you see," went on Mr. Blacker, not in the least put out; "and it is right you should know. It seems, your daughter and Mr. Vivian went off on an expedition to a fair; and really what they say—in fact, it is only proper you should contradict the stories, or take action in the matter."

"And what are the stories, pray?"

"Well, you know, for a young girl to go off with a gentleman and spend the whole day, and not return till midnight; and, they say, was seen dancing there."

"What liars they are!" said Mr. Dacres, warmly. "And you help to propagate this rubbish. *You're* a charitable minister."

Before Mr. Blacker could reply, the door opened suddenly, and Vivian entered.

"I beg pardon," he said, "but I thought Miss Dacres—"

"You are just in time," said Dacres, taking another turn. "Here's a charming piece of news, brought in by our friend here. It seems there are stories going about as to that expedition of yours to the fair. I look to you, my friend, to clear up all this to the satisfaction of these impudent meddlers, who go worrying themselves with what don't concern them. Tell this gentleman, were you and she dancing on a common platform there?"

"It is quite false," said Vivian, indignantly; "we left before the dancing began. You were there yourself."

"Oh!" said Mr. Blacker, surprised. "Mr. Dacres was there? That is quite a different thing."

"Yes, of course it is!" said Dacres. "I suppose a father can take his child for a holiday, without the low broken-down herd of this place being consulted? See here, Mr. Blacker, I don't at all take it friendly of you, coming here on such an errand. I don't think it concerned you; and, I tell you what, I don't mean to let the matter rest here. To begin, I must have the name of your authority for these slanders."

"Oh, really, I am not prepared—"

"Oh, but really, I am, though. I tell you, I shall go round, and make *you* go round, and contradict this. I say again, who had you these lies from?"

"Common rumour, my dear sir—the common gossip of the place."

"I can tell you," said Vivian, calmly. "There was only one person there who could have sent such stories afloat, and only one person who had a motive in doing so. I have learned enough of him lately to know that his malignity would stop at nothing."

"By Jove, Vivian, you've hit it," said Dacres, starting up. "That's the quarter, sir! A mere creeping fellow, and just like his little spite. I'll choke him off! What does he mean by vilifying my child? See here, now, Blacker. I expect you—at once—to go round to all the old women and set this right."

"Oh, certainly," said Mr. Blacker, rather alarmed. "It is only right, and proper, and Christian. You may depend on me."

"I know I may," said Mr. Dacres, grimly.

When Mr. Blacker was gone, Dacres closed the door softly, and looking steadily a moment, said to Vivian:

"This is a nice mess, eh?"

"Leave it to me," said Vivian. "I shall take a decided course with these Wests."

Mr. Dacres had been listening, and regarding him very steadily, as he spoke.

"Very proper and very suitable," he said.

"But now that brings us to the point. You see what all this comes to, Colonel Vivian. And to what a pass this shilly-shallying has brought us! I don't see so much harm in this news of Blacker's, because the remedy is easy. So now it's time for me to put a plain question. Vivian, my colonel, what day do we fix for this marriage?"

"I tell you, as I stand here, it is the happiness I am looking forward to, as I am to living out my own life!"

"Oh, of course, I am sure of all that," said the other, dryly; "and the best proof of this, is for you to fix the time."

"I am helpless, I tell you," said he, passionately. "If it was to be this very hour, I would willingly agree; but there is one thing which I cannot tell, and which you must not ask me, which must put it off yet. I know it seems strange, but I have spoken to her. *She* knows me, and understands me."

"Very good," said Mr. Dacres, slowly. "That will all do very well for her, you know, and all that; but you and I must take a business view of it. Since you don't fix the day, Colonel Vivian, I do. Let me see now. Your Duchess of Kent sails on the twenty-third. You will have to leave here on the night of the twentieth, to give yourself a margin for accidents, so on the morning of the twentieth we'll have our little ceremony, and go away snug by the evening boat. Do you see?"

The other remained silent and stupefied.

"That's all arranged. Or, if you *do* require time, you don't leave this place, and the Duchess must go without you. You must see, yourself, there can be no trifling in this matter. It has gone too far. You wouldn't like, I know, to be sailing away in your comfortable ship, drinking your duty-free claret below, while my poor little thing is fretting herself out here, with the foul fingers of these scandal-mongers pointed after her. No, no."

Vivian felt that it was not only Dacres who was putting this state of things before him, but his own heart.

"Now see. I don't ask you to say anything," went on Mr. Dacres, "for I know you are a man of the world, and have plenty of sense. Ah! there is Lulu herself, bright as the very morning dew. Ah, my pet, all the world over is busy with your little name."

Lucy, with a little trouble in her face, looked from one to the other. Trials of late seemed to be visiting her life.

"Your amiable friend West," he said, "has been showing his hoof again. But I have news for you, my pet. Papa and Vivian have been talking over something definite, and have fixed on the day when he's to carry off his little treasure, and poor old Harco is to be left sitting over his empty grate. Yes: the twentieth is the joyful day;" and in a low, half-plaintive tone, he began the ecclesiastical refrain:

"Sing ye the joyful day,
All join in praise!"

Lucy looked at Vivian wistfully, but with the light of a secret joy spreading over her face. She saw his face downcast; his eyes on the ground. She said, hesitatingly, to her father:

"We must not hurry, Harco dear—we have so many things to think of."

"And what do you know, pray?" said he, turning on her sharply; "or have you been settling this between you? See here, now. I had to speak plainly to our dear colonel a few moments ago, and I must speak plainer still. I don't want to know your secrets or your family affairs; and what, colonel, you call the difficulty in this matter. That's your own concern. Get rid of it, or keep it, as you like. God grant you may! But I can't recognise it."

Things have gone too far for that; and if we hear more of it, I can only say it will take a very ugly look, and give rise to ugly suspicions. So now I ask you again, before her, for a plain answer. Will that day which I have fixed as the very latest suit you? Or is it your intention to try and leave this place without fulfilling what you have engaged to do? I say, *to try.*"

Vivian's face worked in emotion. Then he looked over at Lucy's wistful face, in which could be seen plainly interest for him and ready sacrifice of herself. She seemed the Dear Girl indeed at that moment.

Dacres went on as though he had a witness in the box: "There is no compulsion, understand—only it must be decided on the spot, sir. I am constrained to give you the alternative. Accept the day, or sail away! Say yes, and you are a true man; say no, or hesitate or shilly-shally, and from this minute you never see or speak to my Lulu again."

Distractedly Vivian turned to Lucy, so gentle, loving, sweet, and beautiful, with an air of sorrow which is at the bottom of all interest. That look decided him, and he answered desperately:

"I agree. Yes, on that day be it!"

"There," said Mr. Dacres, seizing his hand. "You are a true man and a noble man, and a fine fellow, and have taken a load from our hearts. Now see how these mists are all dispelled as a vapour. I merely go out, see all the old women of both sexes, and tell them the glad day is fixed. Where be their stories then? where their gibes? They may paint an inch thick, and welcome. I'll be off at once. As for that viper West, shall I take him in hand, or you?"

"Leave him to me," said Vivian, excitedly. "Don't be alarmed, Lucy dearest, there shall be no quarrelling nor confusion; but he must be warned."

Mr. Dacres then went out, leaving the young ones together. Vivian, for the first time, took that slight figure in his arms, and said, "Heaven send that no ill may come of this!"

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